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DESPERATE JOURNEY

Vienna – Paris – Auschwitz

by

FREDDIE KNOLLER with John Landaw

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Foreword

I first met Freddie Knoller in the mid 1980's at a small apartment in the South of France. We sat by a pool. I knew Freddie was a survivor and, lightly dressed as our group was on such a hot day, I could easily see the vein-blue numbered tattoo on his forearm. I remember exchanging a few words with him about his war he smiled, offered me a few short words - that he had been in Paris...had even been in the Resistance for a while, and then the conversation moved on.

I met Freddie again some eight or so years later, when he asked me to contribute an article to a small magazine he helped produce called Judaica Collector, dedicated to all Jewish collectibles, though mainly to stamps on Jewish themes. In his youth Freddie was an avid philatelist.

It was not until 1995 that I met Freddie again. He had written a book, he told me, all about his life, but he needed someone to help - he felt he was unable to do justice to his experiences in his own words.

The manuscript he sent me was slim, but it contained a remarkable story. Yet, for all its drama, the tale seemed flat, uninvolved, distanced. "How did you feel here, here and here?" I found myself asking Freddie over and over

again. And then there was another feature which drained the potential life from the story, and that was a succession of incomplete narratives: characters appeared and then simply disappeared with no real explanation as to the whys and wherefores.

I believe that the major reason for these shortcomings lie, firstly, in the extremely traumatic nature of the experiences, which often leads to dissociation. The experiences are so intolerable that they are denuded of the intense feelings aroused, which in turn are sealed away in a locked mental box. Freddie's parents perished in Auschwitz, he survived that place and other camps, extinction, and the threat of his own extinction never more than a hairs breadth away. Hence the flatness of the narrative, which echoes the flatness in the voice of many people who have survived extreme trauma and speak of it in the same tone they would adopt in speaking of a shopping list. Those who liberated Belsen spoke of the "stoniness" of the survivors. That was how the manuscript Freddie gave me read, affectless. The story, we must remember, was written by a man who had, for thirty years, disowned that terrible past, remembered it only as a series of events and wordlessly memorialized its reality through the tattoo.

Secondly, and entwined with trauma, is the sense of guilt which haunts all survivors. Some of that guilt is "irrational" - the legacy of the persecutors- "why did I survive and others did not?" And do I, who did survive deserve the luxury of feelings?" which also contributed to the distant feel of the original

manuscript. In the context of this kind of guilt it is a remarkable fact that the scores of letters which Freddie's parents wrote to Eric, Freddie's brother, whom they had got out to America, remained undiscovered amongst Eric's possessions until after his death. He was almost certainly tormented by his own survival in the face of the death of his parents. He could not bring himself to destroy this memorial to them, this vast correspondence, but neither could he bring himself to speak of it.

But some guilt is of a different order. To survive the Nazi holocaust required, luck, certainly, but also the ability to act out of pure self-interest, which might include an indifference at times to the fate of ones fellows, save only if the fellow is a friend and, in particular, a useful friend. In the Paris section of this book we find Freddie meeting a fellow Viennese Jew, Otto Geringer, in a Jewish restaurant. They began to live together, became friends, explored the red-light district. Freddie sets out to meet Christos, who is making commissions from the clubs for introducing German soldiers. Suddenly, we jump to Freddie working with Christos. But what of Otto? There was no further reference in the text to him. The filling in of that significant gap proved painful but was crucial. Freddie had registered Otto's "very Jewish appearance" from the moment they had met, he told me. He could not possibly have included him in his work with German soldiers, so Freddie "abandoned" Otto without a word. Then there was the tiny detail of the gold coin Freddie's mother sewed into the lining of his knapsack. I realized, late in the day, that it

was not mentioned in the text again, though what happened to that coin turned out to be of great emotional significance.

Then, there were what I might call "my" difficulties in writing this book. Drawing out through regular working together feelings of guilt, grief and even those small pieces of factual information which, whilst never forgotten, might seem merely incidental at first blush but added greatly to the picture was a process I *shared* with Freddie. I asked questions, many, many questions and he did his very best to answer. For example how did Freddie remember sixty years on that there was an *intercom* at the door of the apartment building where the Aptes lived in the Belgelei in Antwerp? Or was this just loose usage on his part? No, he recalled it because he had never come across such a luxurious device. This small piece of information, then, gave the flavour of his always slightly inhibited relations with this kindly, but intimidatingly rich family.

But in two central areas remain the unanswerable. One is the hieroglyphics of human personality, the chicken and egg of what Freddie is or, what has made Freddie what he is. Nature against nurture, that oldest of debates. The man who stood amongst the ruins of the refugee camp of Exaarde in Belgium and then decided to go to occupied Paris, because Paris was the city of his dreams, rather than return to the relative safety of Unoccupied France, where he had been staying with members of his family since his escape from the detention camp in St Cyprien: what does this action

tell us about Freddie? Originally I had speculated at some length, without a lot of consultation with Freddie, about how at that point, standing at Exaarde, he felt completely adrift, felt the need to remove himself from anyone connected with his family - those parental figures who were no longer able to support him and so had, in an internal sense, let him down. From now on, he knew he could only rely on himself. Then, in talking with Freda, his wife, about this section, she smiled with an air of weary knowledge, dismissing my analysis out of hand and remarking: "You don't know my Fred, that's him, he wants to do a thing he does it, without thinking. He's always been like that." A wife speaks! Freddie, the impulsive, unreflective kind of person. And we do learn that Freddie fell in love with Freda on the telephone, just from the sound of her voice. But neither she, I, nor even Freddie himself can really *be* that boy at Exaarde. Neither can Freda really know whether Freddie had "always been like that." Had Hitler not come, and Freddy not lived through the ordeal of Auschwitz and Belsen would he today have still been the impulsive, friendly, even over-friendly, and occasionally vague person he is?

And, moving on to the second area of "my" difficulty how do we *find* our young selves sixty years on? This is one aspect of the problem of memory.

As Proust declares:

"And so it is with our own past. It is a labour in vain to attempt to recapture it.: the efforts of all our intellect must prove futile. The past is hidden somewhere outside the realm, beyond the reach of intellect, in some material object (in the sensation which that material object will give us) which we do not suspect."

So, after some early attempts where I tried hard to get to the root of Freddy's feelings and motivation at that point in the ruins of Exaarde, and often came up with mere stylistic flourishes - a sure sign I wasn't getting there! - I tried to follow Chekhov's dictum: "to show not to tell." I remembered Proust and thought: "there *was* an object which Freddy sought at Exaarde: his cello," that tie with his home sent on by his parents. Now resisting all attempts at commentary in the text, I simply asked Freddie why he did not go back to Gaillac. All he knew, he said, was that he wanted to go to Paris, as to the rest.....well...it was so hard to say, the way things were then....So I have rendered this episode plainly and leave it to the reader's sense of Freddy to discern or merely sense for themselves the inner process behind the action. Perhaps somewhere in the book the reader will sense that Proustian "smell and sense of things (which) remain poised a long time," things unsaid here but perhaps felt when "from a long distant past nothing subsists, after the people are dead."

What we do know is that a teenager who had led an anxiously protected life - unsurprising given the anti-Semitic atmosphere of Austria - went with his parents and brothers to a railway station in Vienna. On his back was a knapsack with a gold coin secreted in the lining by his mother "for an emergency." At the station this "immature youth," as Freddy always describes himself, bade farewell to his family and boarded a train for Cologne to a future of complete uncertainty, an unnerving prospect not unalloyed with excitement at having this early, untutored adulthood thrust upon him. For six years he lived on his three resources: luck, optimism and wits.

We, who have never been in such a situation, can only try to imagine what effect such a shattering of our attachment bonds would have on us, let alone the effect of being an inmate of the camps: Auschwitz, Dora and Belsen.

Memory of a different kind - what actually *happened* - a problem of memory retrieval as opposed to the feelings attached to them is a different problem, though such extraordinary lapses of recall as Freddie forgetting that his cousins visited him in Paris during his time there, (a visit confirmed by one of his living cousins,) are almost certainly connected to the trauma of those times. For Freddie alone of his surviving family members endured the physical and emotional privations of the camps. We have not only admitted but have indeed *highlighted* such lapses of memory because Freddy does not pretend to perfect recall of those terrible years and is not afraid, for fear of losing his reader's belief in his story, to declare this.

Working with Freddie over the years of completing this book has been exhilarating, exhausting, stimulating and, sometimes, overwhelming. There were moments when we fell silent, and those moments were nearly always before some words in Freddie's parents' letters from Nazi occupied Vienna, such as when his mother asks Freddie's brother, Eric, got out to America, whether he is proud of his mother's progress in English, for the time when they will be together again.

It has been a rare privilege to have collaborated with Freddie in the writing of this book. If I had known how long it was going to take, I still would have done so.

John Landaw
Highgate, London.

INTRODUCTION

It was in May 1996 that I travelled to Florida from my home in London for the funeral of my brother, Eric.

Some months later a large parcel arrived, sent by Vivian, Eric's widow. I had not been expecting any such package and I started to open it in a state of some puzzlement. Imagine then my surprise to find before me a vast pile of correspondence, and then the dizzying rush of feeling I experienced as I recognized the unmistakable elegant copperplate hand of my father. In her accompanying note, Vivian explained that she had come across this correspondence when she had been sorting through Eric's personal effects. She felt I should have them. She added that she hoped I might translate the letters for her. She expressed her surprise at their existence as Eric had never spoken of them.

When I had recovered a little I scanned these letters more closely, seeing now postscripts in my mother's hand, the odd letter from my other brother, Otto, still alive and well in New York. Vivian, it transpired, had sent a bundle to him, too, but Otto had found the contents too painful to read and, when I suggested to him that I might put these letters into a book, he gladly sent his bundle to me, so that I now possess the entire collection.

In time I started to think more about Eric's silence over these letters and realized that it was not so very different to my own. Along with the pain the letters caused us went our sense of guilt, the guilt of survivors. But what must Eric, in particular, have felt, safe in America soon after Anschluss with his sponsors, the rich and important Apte family? He was the only son who could help our parents. When, later, we all knew their fate, Eric must have examined his conscience and wondered whether he might have done more to save our parents. This is what the letters were begging him to do. The truth is that he did all he could and could not have done more, but survivor guilt is not rational.

I myself remained silent about my experiences until I was fifty three years old, nearly thirty years after my liberation from Bergen Belsen. During all that time I had worked on making a new life in which my past had no place. I did not remove the

tattooed number 157103 from my forearm, though neither did I display it. I preferred long-sleeved shirts. This and a small piece of my concentration camp stripes with a red triangle belonging to a dead French political prisoner were the only tangible relics of my war.

Then, during one traditional Friday night family dinner my eldest daughter, Marcia, who was then twenty, asked me to tell her about “my life before.” Susie, my seventeen year old, quickly joined in: yes, it was now time to say something. What would she be able to tell her children about their grandfather’s life? It was those words which made me respond. I thought, what do I know about my own parents’ life before I was born? It is almost a blank. A powerful sense about something which might be lost forever if I did not speak overwhelmed me. I began my story and it was the early hours of the next morning before I had finished it.

From that time on the nightmares, of endless flight and pursuit, which I had intermittently suffered began to recede, but where there was silence is now the need never to be silent.

I spend my waking hours involved in every aspect of Holocaust activities. It has become a mission, it is all-consuming, it is obsessive. I lecture, I attend symposiums, I give interviews, I attend a survivor’s centre. Even when I am quiet, my story is replayed on monitors at the Imperial War Museum’s Holocaust Exhibition. And now, although I have written my book, I can see no end in sight.

I dedicate this book to my parents’ memory.

MY EARLY LIFE - Vienna 1921-1938

Sunday April 17th 1921, the day of my birth, was the first lovely day of Spring, or so my mother always liked to tell me. I inherited my optimistic nature from my father, but it is also pleasant to believe that some guardian power granted sun on the day of my birth. Because of one thing I am certain, it was only my optimistic nature and pure good luck pulled which me through the Nazi years.

I was the youngest of three sons, a real mother's boy. I was named Alfred but, for as long as I can remember, I have been called Freddie or Fredl. During my refugee years in Belgium I reverted to my original name. My nom de guerre in France was Robert. Later, in Auschwitz, my name was of no importance. I was simply 157103.

My parents, Marja and David, were born in Galicia, then part of Austro-Hungary. My mother came from Lemberg (Lvov) and my father from Dynov, both part of what became Poland once more at the end of the First World War. I believe that my grandfather, Schlomo, had moved to Vienna with my grandmother Sara to take a job in a bank but had then returned to Dynov, where my father was born in 1882. I am uncertain about these events because my parents spoke little of their life in Poland. It was as if they had disowned it, perhaps because of the stigma attached to being "Ostjuden." Being an Ostjud was a stigma amongst Jews, too.

We were a typical lower-middle class Jewish family. My father was a bookkeeper for a Viennese wholesale fashion firm, Grossner und Weiss Nachfolger. It is the only job I remember him having. He was very proud that he had worked for the same firm for so many years, and would often declare the fact but his pride in this achievement was a mask for his innate caution, his lack of ambition, because he feared stepping from the well-trodden path. Mr Herr, the owner of the company, lived in a luxurious villa with his family on the outskirts of Vienna. He must have thought a lot of my father because he once asked him to become a partner, yet father turned his boss down. "Let him have the headaches," he said to my mother, "I'll take my wages."

Father had his seat at the nearby local synagogue, the striking domed, Polnischer Tempel, later destroyed by fire on the night of the anti-Jewish Kristallnacht riots. He was not especially religious, an attender mainly on high days and holy days.

We lived in the second Bezirk, the Leopoldstadt or, as the gentile Viennese called it, *Matzes Insel*, the Island of Matzos. We mixed only with Jews, merely exchanging greetings with our Christian neighbours. We were strangers to each other. With relations such as these, anti-semitism, as pervasive as it was in Austrian society, could only flourish. Our home was in a large block located in the Untere Augartenstrasse, 32. We lived on the third floor, six of us, in a two room apartment overlooking a courtyard. The rooms were large but it still amazes me how we managed. In one big bedroom slept my parents, myself, and Eric, our middle brother. Our oldest brother, Otto, slept in the dining cum living room on a sofa which doubled as his bed. In the kitchen, on a folding bed, slept our maid. The toilet, and the basin with cold running water were in the corridor and shared with the tenants of the two adjoining apartments. There was no heating in the corridor, and no light in the toilet. Each apartment had a key for the toilet and, by the light of a candle I sat in there and read the pocket books forbidden by my father, cheap soft cover adventure and pornographic books. The hero of the adventure books I remember to this day: Tom Shark. All such books my father destroyed if he found them. Of course, we had no bathroom so, after school on Fridays, we went to the Diana Bad nearby to take a bath.

Typically Viennese was the fact that all the children played a musical instrument. It was our parent's delight to hear us perform - Otto on the piano, Eric on the violin and me on the cello. This mainly happened on Friday nights after the traditional candlelit Sabbath meal. A widow called Mrs Kohn sometimes joined us, who was religious and so insisted in bringing her own food. Still, her boiled chicken was quite delicious. After the meal we all sang the latest popular songs from sheet music which Otto obtained from the music publishers, Francis Day. Then, we three boys played light chamber music and popular arrangements. Gershwin and Rodgers and Hammerstein

were particular favourites. My mother was actively involved with Jewish charity, a member of Wizo, and the Knoller boys often played at such events. The programme would often contain a well-known and well-worn medley of Jewish music called *Altes aus dem Osten* (Old Tunes from the East).¹

At six years old I entered the Volksschule in the Leopoldgasse, not far from my home, and it was here that I first experienced anti-semitism. Other six year olds called us Sau Jud, Jew pig, and spat at us. Where, so young, could they have learnt this hatred, but in their very homes? The next time a gentile boy did this to me I punched him on the nose. Blood streamed and his friends set upon me, beating me with their heavy satchels. I ran home, clothes torn and body bruised, but proud of what I had done. Yet my parents castigated me. I was to run away from Christian children and avoid a fight with them at all costs, they told me. I was bewildered by their attitude, too young to understand their old Jewish fear of rousing gentile wrath and reprisal. The very next day the boy whose nose I had bloodied wanted to make friends with me. His friends should not have attacked me, he said, five fellows onto one was not fair. We did become friends and quickly discovered our shared enthusiasm for stamp collecting. His name was Karl Swoboda, a typical Austrian Christian, fair haired and blue eyed and wearing lederhosen. Sometimes I went to his home, in a poor neighbourhood near ours, where his mother was always kind to me. Yet my parents forbade me to bring any Christian boy into the apartment. I remember once asking Karl about his ancestry. With a name like Swoboda he must have had Czech ancestors, I suggested. "Never!" he said, quite angrily, "I am Austrian, pure Austrian!" Karl did not follow me into the Gymnasium. He could not have taken, or must have failed, the entrance examination and so gone to an ordinary secondary school. We still met sometimes, but it was only our stamp-collecting passion which now connected us.

I was friendly with only one other gentile. This was Mr Hagmann, the "Hausbesorger" or caretaker, of our apartment block. He, too, was an avid

¹ The arranger of these medleys was Isy Geiger, who emigrated to England and became a quite well-known

philatelist. We often pored over his beautifully kept collection of Austrian stamps and, as with Karl, who sometimes joined us, we would exchange items. I never sensed any anti-semitism in Mr Hagmann. He was proud, he told me, of being a socialist.

At school, Jews received separate religious instruction. This might now seem, in a multi-cultural society, an enlightened state of affairs, but in Vienna it only seemed to accentuate our difference from our gentile school fellows. Our religious teacher, Professor Glaser, was the archetype of the soft, ineffectual Jew. We ran rings round the poor old gentleman, with his wispy white beard and thick framed glasses, from behind which his magnified eyes darted helplessly about as we talked through the entire class.

Nevertheless, at thirteen, I went through the traditional Bar-Mitzvah ceremony. Afterwards we all gathered in our apartment for a festive meal. There were many relatives there including my mother's family, the Bodeks. There was Uncle Herman, my mother's brother, and his wife, Genia and my cousins - their children - Rosi, Leo and Maxl. They lived in the Simmering district, on the outskirts of Vienna - a poor district. That Bar-Mitzvah celebration was in early 1934. Who amongst that group could have known that in a mere four years Austria would no longer be their country? And that Nazism would take the parents of the Knoller and Bodek children?

My father was a heavily built man, noticeably taller than my mother. I remember him having a moustache when I was very young but this he later shaved off, whether or not under mother's instruction, I do not know. He said he removed it because he wanted to look young. Wherever father went he wore a tie. I cannot ever remember seeing him in what one would call casual clothes. Although his expression was genuinely kindly - and he would show his love for his children, perhaps when we had achieved something scholastically or on relaxed family outings to the Vienna woods, when we sang together, he could be very stern if we earned his disapproval and would not hesitate to

deprive us of pocket money, smack us or even take a cane to us if the offence were serious enough in his eyes. Afterwards, it was mother who comforted us. His code was a simple, unbending moral one- right and wrong were clear and unambiguous concepts for him. Education was very important to him, especially in a society where Jews were excluded from a number of professions. Ever anxious to foster an enquiring mind in his sons he was at pains to answer all our questions and I remember what a good listener he was, seeming to take in every word we said with an acute expression on his face. There was little room to make a fool of yourself when someone was listening like that. With such a cast of mind it was hard for father to accept that Eric, often found asleep over his books, was no academic. Otto recalls a scene in our home when Eric came home with a bad school report. Father chased Eric round the table, nearly tripping over one of the legs in his angry pursuit. But in the end father got the message and Eric was set to work in Grossner & Weiss, where father was employed. He became messenger boy and a cleaner, but he greatly preferred this to school.

As a teenager Otto had become very fond of a girl called Lotte but none of us was allowed to bring girls into the apartment. One day father forbade Otto from seeing Lotte altogether. The reason? He had discovered that her sister was a divorced woman.

This father, so strict with us, was nevertheless putty in the hands of Mama. He could not resist her. If I wanted something, it was to Mama I went. Mama could persuade father about almost anything to do with the children. Mother was quite short, quite plump but with a kind, round face framed appealingly by her soft fair hair. She was carefree in spirit where he, despite his optimistic nature, was a stiff person. Mother was a demonstrative, expressive person who loved dancing and mingling with people. We children lived in her heart and she did not disguise this fact. Tears of pride were never far from her eyes as the audience clapped the Knoller brothers performing their medley of music on stage at Wizo fund raising events. It was a classic attraction of opposites between her and father. It was in the outer world, the

world of men and their transactions, that she relied entirely on father's judgement and this was, in the end, both their tragedies for father's belief in the simple and predictable, and above all the essential decency of people, meant that he could not begin to envisage the nature of the tragedy soon to engulf us all.

It was in that year of my Bar-mitzvah, 1934, that I joined the Realgymnasium in the Sperlgasse. In charge of physical training was an anti-semitic teacher, Professor Myer. He loved to ridicule less athletic Jews. "Come on," he'd say, "you're not in the synagogue now."

I joined the *Verein der Sozialistischen Mittelschueler*, the Association of Socialist High School Pupils. It was natural to do so. The Jews voted Social Democrat because the left was not so anti-semitic, standing as it did for values other than race and nation. This was demonstrated by the fact that Jews, such as Victor Adler, Otto Bauer and Julius Tandler held prominent positions in the party. Vienna was run by the Social Democrat Party, whilst the nation was in the hands of the Christian Social Party. Though retaining its clerical antipathy to Jews, the party had no sympathy for the National Sozialistische Partei, who were anti-Catholic. The Nazis were in a minority - they were a nuisance - but their importance, it was generally felt, was not to be exaggerated.

It was when I was fourteen, in 1935, and fell in love for the first time that I gloomily understood the sexually uneven competition I was engaged in with my older brothers. We were at Lake Balaton in Hungary and that holiday place will always be associated in my mind with pretty, buxom Rosza. She was young, too, about my age, but looked older and, as she was testing her effect on the opposite sex, I was as good a subject for these tests as any other male person. She turned my head and I thought she must be in love with me, but she soon attracted Eric's eye, preferring him to his short, younger brother. Eric was tall, fair-haired and good-looking. I felt miserable and second best. And why did I have to look so young for my years? I was also the only one in

the family who wore glasses, but that didn't make me look older, merely a studious youngster. In all this preoccupation I was unable to perceive Eric's shyness and uncertainty about himself which originated, I am sure, in his experiencing his academic weakness through father's eyes. Eric had already left school whilst Otto was at University and I was in high school. Many years later, Eric would find in Vivian a wife whose strong personality compensated for his lack of confidence in himself.

As for Otto, he was clever, but also a light-hearted fellow, popular with everybody, including girls. He was also a fine pianist. Of course, I wanted to be around both my brothers, copying what I saw as their grown-up ways. But I was a kid brother to them, jovially patronized and never included in their private affairs, despite the fact that Eric was much nearer in age to me - two years older - than he was to Otto, six years older than him. It was as if it were set in stone that I was their baby brother, and perhaps it was mother's very protective way with me in particular, her youngest, which accounts for a part of that.

At home it was the same story. In an apartment across the courtyard, Fraulein Pollack had the habit of undressing in front of her window. Otto and Eric whispered together as they studied her through binoculars. By the time these Peeping Tom brothers handed the binoculars over to me Fraulein Pollack had her night dress on, and this seemed to confirm, in some symbolic way, that all three of them were engaged in some unspoken conspiracy against me: such sights, they all understood, were not for the eyes of the young. It took Auschwitz, I believe, and not the fact that we were all then adults, for my brothers to change their feelings towards me. A respect grew out of what I had been through and survived which permanently changed our relations.

The year 1938 started with tremendous political activities. Political posters and stickers urging people to vote one way or the other in the coming referendum covered the walls and pavements. Just as I collected

stamps, so Eric collected these, peeling them from wall and lamp post and sticking them neatly in an album. What a historical document they would have made! But father, in a rage with Eric over some matter or other tore the collection to pieces, a quite uncharacteristic action for him.

Because of events in Germany the Nazis were daily growing in confidence. They demonstrated and chanted with increasing vociferousness for "Ein Volk, Ein Reich, Ein Fuhrer." The Schutzbund, the militant part of the Socialists, responded. The ruling Christian Socialists under Schuschnigg were for Austria's continuing independence but they were fearful of the big German nation. Austria was in turmoil. Hatred hung like a poisonous cloud in the air and soon it descended onto the streets. Otto returned from the University, where he was studying medicine, with a bloody face. There were daily fights there between Nazi and anti-Nazi students. Under Austrian law the police had no jurisdiction to intervene because the clashes were on University premises. Until now, only very few Jews really understood which way the wind was blowing. These few included the father of my school friend Freddie Breitfeld, who had transferred his fur business to England as far back as 1936.

The Anschluss, 11th March 1938

The referendum on the issue of Austrian independence was set for the end of March 1938. It was fairly certain that the Christian Socialists would prevail.

Late in the afternoon of Thursday 10th March the whole family crowded anxiously round the radio. There had been a rumour for hours that the plebiscite was going to be cancelled. An ominously vague announcement that we were to stand by for an important statement lent credence to this rumour. At 7:30pm Schuschnigg finally addressed the nation:

Austrian men and women! This day has brought us face to face with a serious and decisive decision.... The government of the German Reich has presented an ultimatum to the Federal President demanding that he appoint a candidate chosen by the Reich Government to the office of Chancellor.....Should the Federal President not accept this ultimatum then German troops will cross our border this very hour.....The Federal president has instructed me to inform the nation that we are giving way to brute force.....we refuse to shed German blood.....we have ordered our armed forces to withdraw without serious resistance...So in this hour I bid farewell to the people of Austria with a German word and a wish from the bottom of my heart: "God Save Austria."

We listened in stunned disbelief, and then came the soft playing of the Austrian national anthem after which nothing came from the radio but the empty crackle of static, into which we poured our direst fears.

The next morning, Friday, March 11th, German troops entered Austria and the two countries became one. Within days even the traffic, which in Austria had driven on the left, now drove on the right as in Germany, a enormous feat of logistics and sheer determination.

We decided to stock up with food, not knowing what the next few days would bring. I went with mother to the shops. I think she wanted me, the youngest, at her side. On the staircase we encountered Mr Hagmann, now wearing a Nazi armband. This essentially decent man greeted us with uncertain eyes and a sheepish good morning.

Out in the streets my mother and I saw that almost every house displayed a swastika flag. Brown-shirted Nazis roamed the streets. We saw them stopping conspicuously Jewish looking men and forcing them to clean

the plebiscite slogans from walls and pavements. Further along the street was a sight to chill the blood. An old bearded Jew was continuously kicked in the backside as he tried to scrape a slogan from the pavement. All around gentile Austrians, some of them women with infants, laughed uproariously.

Severely shaken, we returned home as quickly as possible with our supplies. We had sufficient to withstand a siege, because the siege mentality had now entered us. Father and my brothers were still gathered around the radio. There was no question of father going to work or Otto to University. When we recounted what we had witnessed on the streets father told us about the radio reports, which were loudly bragging that the German troops had received a tremendous welcome from the Austrian populace. Of course, although we knew that the radio was in the hands of the new regime, from what mother and I had seen we had no reason to doubt the general truth of the reports. Father told us that the commentator had triumphantly described a mass Austrian Nazi rally on the Ring Strasse. Seyss-Inquart, the new head of state, had spoken on the radio, telling us that the cause of all Austria's problems was the Jews, not only Austrian Jewry, but world Jewry, which controlled every country not only financially, but morally. This was but one of a score of anti-semitic speeches we heard that day. The Nazi slogan: *Die Juden sind unser Unglück*, the Jews are our misfortune, rang in all our ears

That evening mother cried fitfully as the telephone rang non-stop. Everyone was ringing everyone else to discuss the situation, but also for the reassurance the voices of friends brings. But how blithely confident father remained throughout it all! At some point the telephone rang for Otto. When he returned he said, "It was a friend. He wants to escape to Italy and he has asked me to join him, but it must be tonight." Father dismissed this. "Your friend is a *meschuggine*," he said. "Hitler will march in and he'll march out. Forget Italy." And Otto did, which almost cost him his life. Despite father's confidence we spent the rest of the night listening anxiously to the radio, as if trying to set our compass by it. "Deutschland uber alles" rang out every so often. Fraulein Schiff, a spinster neighbour and close friend, came to us in

tears. "What shall we do? What shall we do?" she said over and over. My father tried to comfort her. "Don't worry, they won't hurt us, we are the old ones. But the children, they have to leave, there is no future for them here." Fraulein Schiff told us that she had a cousin in Miami, Florida. "Maybe he can help," she said, "Mr Apte is a rich man, with an orange canning factory. Then there is my other cousin in Antwerp, Jos Apte, a diamond merchant." She promised to write to both her relatives about us youngsters, and we thanked her with all our hearts.

One shopping trip with my mother I remember particularly well. I hated shopping and so would wait outside for her. I liked watching the people passing by and, yes, gazing at the dramatic red, black, and white of the swastika flags hanging from almost every window because they made quite a display. It was on this day that I saw a familiar figure approach. It was Karl Swoboda, smartly dressed in a Hitler Youth uniform, but the uniform did not deter me. I would speak to him. Hadn't we spent many hours together over our stamps, even if we were not close friends any more? As I opened my mouth to greet him I saw that Karl had seen me, but he instantly looked straight ahead. I called after him: "What's the matter? Don't you say hello?" He walked on, as determined to disown me as he had been his Czech ancestry. Very upset, I told my mother about the incident. She hardly knew Karl, as he had never been invited to my home, but she said I was never to speak to any Nazi or Christian again, who are no friends to Jews. It was this personal incident which made me realize how much and how irredeemably things had changed for the Jews.

In the days following came the reports of the arrests of Jews and other dissident elements. The well-known luxury Metropole hotel had become Gestapo headquarters. From here Jews were deported to Dachau.

In all this the reader must bear in mind that in Germany Hitler had moved only step by step against the Jews. By 1938 the intensifying momentum

of persecution hit the Austrian Jews all at once and so we were quite unprepared for it.

Otto, Eric and I became part of the flood of people seeking to emigrate to any country which would take them. Our parents, tragically hanging onto the belief that they were safe because of their age, thought only of America for themselves. All of us had registered at the American embassy, yet America was one of the most difficult countries for our parents to enter; the "Polish Quota" was enormous, simply because so many Jews seeking escape, like my parents, had been born in Poland. We boys tried everywhere, queuing sometimes all night, at the gates of embassies of countries we had scarcely heard of, because of some rumour that one or the other of them was issuing visas. Wherever we went there were the seemingly same hundreds of Jews in front of us. We tried the embassies of Chile, Peru, Equador, Uruguay.....I got to know the names of virtually every South American country. Once, we nearly managed to get a visa for Shanghai, which had its own independent consulate, but were sent home with only two people in front of us.

It was around this time that my parents decided I had to learn a trade. I therefore entered the Tailoring Academy in Vienna. There was no option. Jews were now banned from Christian schools and had to attend vocational trainings. We had been used to restrictions in education and opportunities for Jews before Hitler. It had been almost impossible, for example, for Jews to become engineers in Austria. Now came something else: we were to be all but returned to the ghetto.

Around July 1938 came the notification of Eric's affidavit for America, which would allow him to leave within a few months. We rushed to Fraulein Schiff with the news and embraced tearfully.

Many people, particularly the young, had already left Vienna. Our cousins, Maxl and Leo Bodek, had left one month before Kristallnacht, illegally entering Belgium. From there they sent their parents, my Aunt Genya

and Uncle Hermann detailed instructions as to how to follow them, with the name of the guide who would facilitate this, for a fee. I begged my parents to let me go with them, but my cautious, upright father was terrified of doing anything unlawful.

Almost a full year after Anschluss Otto received that letter from the army which he refers to in a letter to Eric:

6th February 1939

Today I received an express, registered summons from Army Headquarters regarding recruitment.

This was almost one year after Anschluss. The bureaucracy plodded on its usual stolid and, in the circumstances, strangely comforting, way. Otto took himself along to the authorities and produced a document dated 6th August 1938 stating that, as a Volljude (full-Jew), he was exempt from military service.

One month after Anschluss, on 27th April 1938, a new law had been proclaimed: all Jews had to declare full details of their assets by 30th June 1938. Recently, I obtained these registration forms from the Austrian archives, completed in my father's excellent hand and I began to remember my father's demeanour at the time, strained, anxious, nervous, recalling him having an unusual number of meetings with lawyers, his bank manager and various anonymous officials but, at seventeen, still considered a child by my father, I was never told of their content.

The asset form my father completed is actually dated 15th July 1938. The document, reproduced here, shows my father's declaration. Amongst other items he lists a life insurance policy with Anker Insurance Company, some shares and savings accounts. He lists a gold tie pin with small diamonds, wedding rings, gold watch and chain, a ladies gold watch. On 6th August he

was instructed to offer his shares for sale to the Reichsbank. I do not know the terms of this forced sale. He informed the authorities on 11th August that he had offered his shares to the Laenderbank for sale.

Kristallnacht, 9th November 1938

In the meantime the event occurred which hastened our departure. On 6th November a Jew, Zyndel Grynsman, entered the German embassy in Paris and shot dead Ernst von Rath, a German diplomat.

On the night of November 9th Erich answered the telephone. It was our neighbours, the Aments.² They lived in the same apartment building as us, overlooking the courtyard, but unlike us they also had a view onto Leopoldsgasse, opposite our synagogue, the Polnische Tempel, one of the most beautiful in Vienna, topped with a magnificent dome. "The synagogue is in flames!" they called down the line. "Yes, there are fire engines, but they are only spraying the other buildings.....the SA are attacking people in the street. ...it's terrible....what are we going to do?" Those words again. All my parents could do was to bolt the doors and turn the lights off. We crept like fugitives to the window and saw the sky burning red with the flames of our synagogue. At midnight Kristallnacht came to us. We heard a noise from the courtyard. Rushing to the window of our darkened home we saw Mr Hagmann talking to SA men, who then entered our apartment building. There was a period of terrible, dense silence, and then we heard the scream of a woman followed by a crashing of glass and a thud in the courtyard below. The dark shape of a person lay there. Another shape ran out into the courtyard and fell, wailing, onto the body. An ambulance arrived and took the body away. That terrible silence fell again. The next morning Mr Hagmann told us it was Mr Epstein who had died. At first Mr Hagmann said he had jumped from his window but, when I pressed him, he admitted he had been thrown out. "I told them only an old couple lived on your floor." On behalf of the Epsteins no

² ed: The children of the Aments survived and emigrated to America. The parents perished

such subterfuge had been possible. They ran their wholesale fashion business from the first floor of our building, with a big sign on the street: ROBES ET MODES BEI EPSTEIN.

The embers of that terrible night were still hot the next day. Eric was in the street and saw the SA arresting Jews. One of the SA made towards him and Eric ran into our building, where he hid in a coal bunker, covering himself in as much coal as possible. In this way he escaped. Later that afternoon Eric ventured outside again, though only to the front of our building. He was talking to a friend, who wore a skullcap. It seemed that a Hitler youth member appeared from nowhere and smashed their heads together. A Christian family observed this incident from across the street, took Eric in and cleaned him up.

After Kristallnacht it was dangerous for Jews to walk on the streets, though, as incredible as it seems, we still held onto the belief that order would be restored, that it had been a one off incident. But our parent's plans for our departure took on a new urgency. Eric would be leaving for America, Otto was making arrangements to go to England via an illegal entry to Holland with his friend Norbert Fuchs. (This took place in May 1939). He could not enter Holland legally as his affidavits were not yet ready.

Mr Apte, from Antwerp had written to us saying he would be glad to receive me should I come to Antwerp. Perhaps this, and the terrible course of events in Austria persuaded my father that his sons had to go, by whatever means.

I was to be the first Knoller boy to leave Austria, and to follow the Bodeks into Belgium. Eric's departure to America would soon follow. Otto was making plans to escape to Holland with his friend, Norbert Fuchs.

My parents bought new clothes for me and a rucksack, in the lining of which my mother sewed a gold coin. "In an emergency, you sell this," she said.

I departed at the end of November 1938. We stood in our apartment, me with my rucksack and my passport with the fresh "J" for Jew stamped in it. Mother sobbed whilst Father took me aside for a paternal lecture.....*I must make right and proper decisions....look after my health.....he would be proud, then that I had managed without my parents....I must write weekly...so that we remained in touch and could help one another.....stay part of each others lives..... until the time we were together again....* Father was fifty-six and mother fifty-three when I left. "You must come soon," I begged them. My father waved aside my plea. They would not harm the old ones, he repeated, it was the young ones who are in danger. I am sure he believed this, although all our Bodek relations had already left.

"And what if things get hard here?" I said.

"Perhaps then we will come," said my father.

We took the tram to the Westbahnhof. At another station, the Nordwestbahnhof, an anti-semitic exhibition was current. The posters for this, displaying a caricature of a Jew with a cleverly hebraized title "Der Ewige Jude," were in evidence all over the city. We scarcely noticed them now. They were the norm, as were the shops we passed daubed with black stars of David. Some had large stickers on their windows: "Kauft nicht von Juden," they said - *Don't buy from the Jews*. Otto and Eric tried to lift our spirits. They joked with me, warning me about girls. I couldn't help swelling with pride because in their humour my older brothers were acknowledging I was nearly a man, like them. My mind flitted back to my experiment with one of our maids on an evening a few years before. I had been alone at home with her, my parents out with friends, my brothers at the cinema. I had gone into the kitchen on the pretext of getting a glass of water. I was in my night shirt. I sat on her bed.

She didn't mind when I began caressing her bosom. I got in bed with her, and she touched me where I had never been touched before. I couldn't control myself and in my naivety thought I was urinating, and was ashamed. She only giggled at the mess I made. I muttered an apology and left her bed.

We stood on a platform, a family about to be separated by the insanity which had gripped a whole people. More tears from mother and now from me, too. I felt the utter, incomprehensible desolation of parting, was gripped with a terror that I would not cope without my family's support and guidance. My mother and I clung to each other for a long time. Farewell words.

I remember sitting in a carriage on a train bound for Cologne, waving to the receding figures of my family. Trains had always meant holidays for me as it was the only time our family travelled on them. Yet my family were not beside me and, in the heedless and quickening rhythm of the wheels, I was being carried not to Lake Balaton and some other pretty Hungarian Rosza, but instead to some remote city. How strange this was and how lost I felt. Yet slowly, in the very heart of this dislocation, a new, strange sensation stole across my apprehension: excitement. Terrible events had thrust an unexpected adulthood upon me, so that now there was nobody in the world to tell me what to do anymore. My aspiration to follow my brother Otto to medical school after I graduated from the Realgymnasium was now a past dream. I was utterly free, and the realization of this thrilled me. Soon enough I was to have my fill of such freedom, and I was never to see my parents again.

On 6th December 1938, my father wrote a postcard to Erich, who was in Rotterdam waiting to embark on a ship to America:

Dearest Erich

For your departure tomorrow I wish you, from your dear mother, from Otto and myself a wonderful and safe crossing. When you arrive in New York, please send me a telegram. Make sure that your trunk No EK 100 has been properly loaded. The lining of your coat³ will arrive, with luck, tomorrow. We will be thinking of you tomorrow on your departure. We are, thank God, in good health and we have only one wish, to hear good news from you and Fredy.....

And soon Otto, too, would make his first, though unsuccessful, attempt to leave the family nest.

³ ed: the reference to the lining of the coat almost certainly refers to some small valuables secreted in it.

A REFUGEE IN BELGIUM 1938-1940

The safest crossing point into Belgium was through Aachen (Aix-La-Chapelle). Uncle Hermann and Aunt Genya had told us the name of the hotel in Cologne, a Jewish one, where I was to ask for a Mr Herzgruber.

The train journey was a long one, almost a whole day. The train was packed with troops, SA and Hitler Youth and so I sat inconspicuously in one corner of a compartment with my head buried in a book. I arrived in Cologne at night. I made my way to the hotel on foot, following Uncle Hermann's directions from a piece of paper. I think that my parents had booked the hotel from Vienna.

The hotel was crowded with Jews. We quickly fell into conversation. Everyone was trying to escape to somewhere. At the desk I enquired after Mr Herzgruber. I was told he would come the next day. I went to bed with those words in my head and fell asleep at once.

The guide Herzgruber was a short, stocky man who wore a felt hat, every inch a German peasant. There were eleven Jews in our particular group. Herzgruber transported us in the back of his truck to his farm near Aachen, now Aix-La-Chapelle, about forty miles away. When we arrived it was still light. He led us to a barn on his property. We were to stay there until nightfall, when he would come for us. He now demanded his fee in advance. Haggling started. We weren't prepared to trust this stranger with the whole amount. He could have fifty percent now, we said, and the remainder after we had crossed the border. Herzgruber finally agreed to this. Naturally we became hungry and he brought us food, for which he charged exorbitantly.

Hours passed before the barn door opened and Herzgruber stood before us again. It was pitch dark outside. "From now on you don't talk," he said, "and make no noise. There are border guards everywhere. When I raise my arms like this," and he demonstrated, lifting both arms above his head, "you get down at once." My heart was racing with excitement as we set off. The faces of some of the younger ones around me betrayed a similar feeling. I kept thinking of one of the cheap novels I had read in the toilet at home, about some prisoner escaping from a South American jail.

We soon entered the even deeper darkness of a forest, now following Herzgruber in single file. I lost all sense of time. We kept moving, twigs cracking under our feet, potholes and obtruding roots setting traps for us. At some point one of the women tripped and let out a yelp of pain and surprise. Herzgruber at once raised his arms and we all fell to the earth, the damp odour filling our nostrils. We lay in complete silence until Herzgruber instructed us to get up and move on. There were slapping sounds for a time as we brushed twigs and earth from ourselves.

It seemed a long time before the trees started to thin out and we could walk more easily. Soon Herzgruber halted, we gathered round and he announced that we were in Belgium. We were to walk straight ahead to a small town. There, at a hotel restaurant, we would meet another guide who would take us to Brussels. We paid over the remainder of the fee and our guide, after carefully counting the money, dissolved back into the forest.

The town we were to go to was a small place called Verviers. It was a fifteen mile walk so, with our mixed team of old and young, it took us several hours on the road to get there. I recall little of this journey, but it must have been around seven in the morning when we arrived. Without much difficulty we found the hotel restaurant and there our new guide was waiting for us. He put us in the back of a covered truck and we travelled the eighty miles to Brussels.

We were numb with tiredness and hunger when the guide deposited us at the Jewish Community Centre, a quite large building in the centre of the city. There we

were given breakfast, some Belgian francs and, at last, mattresses. Exhausted, I fell asleep at once, but my mind gave me no rest and sent me a dream full of apprehension and insecurity. I was returning to my parent's home, they took me in their arms, I felt safe, but no, they told me I had to go, and at once. I protested, but it was no use and I cried....

When we awoke in the afternoon we were interviewed by a senior official there. What plans did I have? Did I know anyone in Belgium perhaps?.... I did not know it then, but in the span of two days I had been introduced to the blueprint of my life for the next five years: separation, hiding, moving, hunger, exhaustion, official questioning.

"I have an introduction to some people called Apte," I told him, "they are related to a neighbour and close friend of ours in Vienna. They live in Antwerp and I want to visit them. There are some of my own family, here in Brussels - refugees like me." The official nodded and produced a railway ticket for Antwerp, and the address of the Jewish Aid Committee there.

I went to visit the Bodeks, I needed to be with family. In the face of Uncle Hermann I could trace my mother's face. I found the place, on the third floor of an old building. Aunt Genya, so much more like my mother in character than Uncle Hermann, cried out in surprise at seeing me and hugged and kissed me. Inside, it was question after anxious question from the Bodeks: - Had I heard from my parents? We know they are rounding up Jews. What is the situation there? Tell us, please! My ever resourceful cousin Rosi had her own reasons for concern - she was trying every means to get her fiancé, Max Schaechter, out of Vienna. He had been arrested after Kristallnacht, and was in prison. He had sent his passport to Rosi. Go to any embassy, he urged her in his accompanying letter, any which would issue an entry visa, then he could get out.¹

Before leaving I visited the Bodeks and stayed one night. They were living in a small, sparsely furnished flat and I remember sharing a bed with Maxl. Neither he nor Leo had wasted any time finding employment. Maxl was tailoring and Leo found work with a furrier. I remember a large sewing machine and ironing board set up in Maxl's room. About that visit I remember little else.

Another train journey. At Antwerp I made my way to the Aid Committee. A few questions, food and bed again. I was advised that it would be unwise to visit the Aptés in the evening. Go in the morning, I was told, before Mr Apte leaves for his business. I never discovered the reason for this particular piece of advice. As in Brussels I was given some money, enough, I was informed, to rent a room and I was instructed to come again every week for a supplement.

Early next morning I found myself outside the Aptés apartment block in Belgelei, a magnificently wide tree-lined avenue. These Aptés were cousins of the Florida Aptés, Eric's sponsors. Success seemed to run in the family. The apartment block was so splendid in appearance that I hesitated for a while before pressing the numbered button on the polished brass plate. A voice startled me, leaping out at me from a grille affair I had scarcely noticed. This was my first encounter with an intercom. The voice turned out to belong to Madame Apte. I spoke into the device, announcing my connection with her cousin, Fraulein Schiff, not at all sure whether Madame Apte would know anything about me. "Yes, yes, of course" she said to my relief, "Take the lift to the third floor." There was a sharp electronic buzz from the front door, which snapped it ajar. I walked through into the luxurious lobby, where the sound of my footsteps was instantly muffled by a density of thick, soft carpet. The lift carried me upwards with extraordinary smoothness and I gazed out at the richly polished apartment doors parading slowly down before my eyes. Eventually the lift slowed to the smooth, faintly sickening halt the way such smart

¹ Ed: Max Schaechter had a stroke of luck. Whilst waiting for Rosi's reply, Max showed one of the officers the receipt for the registered letter. The officer, perhaps lazy, ignorant or indifferent, thought this was a visa for Belgium. Max was released, with twenty-four hours grace to leave Germany (Austria now being part of Germany). Max left Germany with nothing but a toothbrush and the clothes he stood in. He married Rosi in Brussels and I attended the wedding.

lifts do. Madame Apte, an elegant, slim woman, no more than in her early thirties awaited me at her apartment door. It was late morning, yet she wore a robe. I was in awe before such indifference to the hour, which spoke of great wealth, and it is a fact that a certain diffidence on my side was always to characterize my relationship with the Aptes. I was always a little abashed before them, the difference between our standing a gulf. But for now Madame Apte did her best to put me at my ease as she smiled, kissed me and welcomed me into a splendid living room. A smartly-dressed maid, quite different to the country girls I had been used to in my home, brought us coffee and biscuits on gleaming silver tray. Madame Apte spoke to her in what I knew to be Flemish.

I sat, not really knowing what to say.

"Do you have money, Freddie?" asked Madame Apte eventually

"Well, I have some from my parents and the Committee, you know, they gave me some, too."

"If you are ever in need you only have to ask."

"Thank you very much, Madame Apte, thank you." But I never did take money from the Aptes. This family had already done so much for us, who were really strangers, only connected to us through our family friendship with Fraulein Schiff, their cousin. Jos Apte's cousin in Florida had got papers for Eric to go there and over the time I knew the Antwerp Aptes they were a model of kindness and generosity. I could never have brought myself to take hard currency from these people.

"You must come Friday night dinner. My husband will be here. He is away on business at present."

I readily agreed.

My head was full of the magnificence of the Aptes' apartment as I made my way back to the Aid Committee.

Over the next few days I fell in with a group of Viennese boys a little older than me, who seemed very streetwise. We went looking for an apartment for all three of us to share, to save a little of the money the Committee was giving us. We found a cheap place in Leverick Straat, in the heart of the orthodox Jewish quarter. The streets stank of chicken droppings. Orthodox Jews with beards and in kaftans ran the shops and I could see them butchering animals in the kosher way. Such filth and the sight of animal slaughter revolted me.

It was around this time that Otto was fortunate to escape with his life. He set the story out in a letter to his friend and fellow escapee Norbert Fuchs, who had emigrated to Australia.

April 20th 1985

Dear Norbert,

Not knowing your history for the past forty years does not diminish the excitement to hear of the wedding of your daughter. I do hope that you will write to me with your life story. I reach on April 5th 1985 my 72nd year "nicht schlecht"..as one says in Viennese. I am still working 8-10 hours per day. I am sure you have read in the newspapers about the Holocaust celebrations in the States, especially in Washington DC. It is therefore quite fitting to think back on the night of December.... 1938, when you and I approached the German Dutch border near Venlo. I recall a lot of snow, coldness, howling of dogs and suddenly you were out of sight. I succeeded crossing the border, was accepted by recommendation to a Dutch

Jewish family, but two days later was jailed by Dutch police in Amsterdam. After a few days was transported back to the German border and with another thirty refugees we walked through the No Mans Land to the border of Germany. I separated myself from the group and spent a few hours at the "Strassengraben," (a ditch) shaving myself in order to look better. At 6:00am I arrived at the German border and was told that about one hour prior to my arrival the SS was waiting for all of us and took all the people to concentration camps. With luck I was able to contact my parents in Vienna and returned by train to Austria.....

In his interview for the Spielberg Archive², Otto adds something significant about his delay at the ditch. He says: "I do not know why I did what I did, but I thought it would be much too dangerous to go with the group to the border."

On January 3rd 1939 father wrote to Eric:

.....Otto is already home again as a "flying Dutchman." What he suffered in Holland cannot be described.....

The Viennese boys I shared with in Leverick Straat were determined to corrupt me.

"Come on Freddie, have a drink. What's the matter with it? You need to loosen up. We'll teach you poker.....we'll have fun."

They gambled with some of the other refugees, and then they did teach me poker and I lost heavily to them. It was not the week's allowance I had to pay over to them that made me and still makes me so ashamed, no, it was the forfeit of the gold coin which my mother had sewn into the lining of my rucksack. My gambling debt was "the emergency" that parted me from a mother's loving thought. Then the boys taught me whoring. First they took me to the dock area, where there was a certain narrow street. Here the prostitutes hung out, half-naked, from windows. It was the first time I had ever seen a woman's uncovered breasts. The women called out brazenly to us. I saw sailors entering the dark passageways below their windows. The boys laughed and I pretended not to be shocked by the scene here. Slightly less shocking were the prostitutes who hung around in a bistro opposite the railway station. The boys went with them regularly. "Come on, Freddie, why not try?" they encouraged me. I knew I would be judged by the boys if I did not, and I dreaded their judgement. I hated the experience, but told the boys otherwise. The end came when they brought beer and wine into the house and we spent the night drinking heavily. I vomited, was laid up for one whole day and could not eat for another two. When I recovered I was disgusted with myself. This was what I was making of my new freedom. I thought of my father's words on parting about how I should comport myself so as to make my parents proud.....and the worst of it, the loss of my mother's coin, blown away in careless indulgences. How I had betrayed my family! All I had wanted to do was keep up with the boys. It would make me a man, as I imagined the boys to be, and all I had become was a mockery of a man. It was enough, and I sought other company.

Amongst the throng of refugees I soon found a boy of my own age who needed someone to share his room. His name was Kurt, a pale, shy, gently spoken boy from Vienna, though I cannot recall his family name. At night he sometimes wept with homesickness. I felt on safe ground again. His room was in a gentile neighbourhood, very clean, and with decent Flemish people who sometimes invited us for dinner. I was happy here.

Then there was my standing invitation to the Aptés for Friday night dinner, which soon became the highlight of my week. It was a blessing to feel part of a family again. Monsieur Jos Apte was a tall, cultivated man, with a particularly soft voice. He loved classical music and often, after dinner, we would sit before his gramophone and listen to symphonies. Instead of the money I would never take from them the Aptés gave me

² ed: as part of the many interviews conducted with survivors of Nazi persecution

presents, once, a tie and a pullover and, often, chocolate bars. Jos Apte was an important member of the Antwerp Diamond Club, and often business colleagues of his from there would join us for dinner. I listened to their conversation politely, and would have been out of my depth even if I had understood their rapid French. The maid, who had brought me coffee on the first day, served at table. The Aptes were modern, highly cultivated people who, whilst maintaining their Jewish identity, were synagogue attenders only on high holidays. They had a child, a boy, I believe, who was cared for by a resident nanny.

On one occasion the Aptes invited me to go for a weekend to a very smart resort called Knocke, on the Belgian coast. What a sensation it was to sit in the back of their big American car. In the front the Aptes chatted non-stop. Every so often they would address a few words to me in German, so that I wouldn't feel ignored. But I didn't mind being ignored because this trip was such a delight. I just liked being in the car and looking out of the window. Nobody I had ever known had a car, let alone an American one. Just to take a taxi was a real extravagance. At the hotel an army of smart, po-faced porters greeted us. In the hotel I had a marvellously luxurious room, with my own bathroom and toilet. I was so taken with this that I would spend ages just luxuriating in the steaming bath. Breakfast on the Saturday morning was a sort of ordeal for me. I wanted to eat everything in sight at the wonderful buffet, but was embarrassed to appear the glutton I was in front of the Aptes. So, the next morning, I forsook the luxury of my room and came down early to have my fill of the delicious offerings.

I soon began to notice a lot of refugees working there. I fell into conversation with a uniformed Jewish bus-boy, who I remember speaking what seemed to me quite good French. "They always need people in the summer," he told me, "there's lots of us working in the kitchens."

It was around January 1939 that my cello arrived from Vienna. I am guided as to the date by my mother's letter to Eric of 17th January 1939, in which she asks him: *Did Fredy write to you that he has received his cello?* Now, I sometimes played at the Aptes, accompanied on the piano by Mrs Apte.

I had received a letter from my parents at the beginning of December 1938, telling me of Eric's departure for America, and one from Otto about his failed attempt to get into Holland. He wrote in desperation to Eric on 19th December 1938, on behalf of himself and mother and father:

...thank God you have arrived safely in America. I have very important requests for you: 1) when is a son able to get his parents to the States notwithstanding the quota? Does he have to be over twenty one or not? How long would he have had to be living in the country? Can he borrow the necessary bank deposit? 2) In the case of a Jewish musician (meaning myself) entering into a contract can he then enter the States through this despite the quota? Would a contract from a private club suffice? Perhaps you can send me some sheet music of a new popular song.

I was in Holland for ten days and have been through terrible times.....tell Mr Apte about the dangerous position I am in, and that I have tried everything to get away from here, but that unfortunately I have not succeeded. Tell him also that as far as I am concerned I could not care less where I go, perhaps he can get me a permit for England? The most important thing would be an affidavit, then I could leave in May 1939. Please try your best. It is very hot for me here. (meaning dangerous)

From my parents came a further letter, telling me that everything was fine, that father was still working for Grossner-Weiss Nachfolgen, and a suggestion that I get in touch with a distant relative by the name of Adolph Menaszkes, who lived in Cairo, in Rue Antikhana. Apparently he was a music professor at the academy there. I didn't even know we had relatives in Cairo, but I wrote to him and he replied enclosing £2 in £1 sterling notes. Every month from then on a letter came from him, enclosing the same amount, a large sum for me.

In the summer of 1939 I spoke to Kurt about going to Knocke. "It's a great place," I said "and we can get work there." We hitch-hiked. And so, once again, I got to stay in one of those smart hotels, the Regent, but behind the scenes and in a small dormitory for the casual summer workers. With no Flemish and little French it was kitchen-work for Kurt and me, dishwashing to be precise. The work was hard, the pay adequate, but the food excellent. In our free time, we mingled with young people in the town and on the beach, boasting that we were guests at the Regent.

Eric's birthday was, as the reader may recall, 11th March, the date of the Anschluss. My parents of course wrote to him, on 5th March 1939, sending him birthday greetings, but in a bitter-sweet way. Things had changed for my father.

Dearest Erich

We have today received your dear letter of 22nd February. "First of all, I wish you on your birthday on 11th March very much happiness and health." As you can see, dear Erich, I already know some English. - yes 11th March is for all of us a memorable day because on this day our destiny has been sealed...may God grant us the opportunity to see each other soon with joy. Amen. I would have liked to have bought you something for your birthday but unfortunately we are too far away from each other. Dearest Erich, as far as our affidavit is concerned it would give us great pleasure if only Mr Apte would give us the affidavit, not your boss. Because the Aptes are already known at this consulate. Also, remember that Mr Bill (ed: Apte) promised to do something for us. Mr Meyer has already received his affidavit from the Aptes. In the meantime he will go to England. I am jealous of Mr Apte.....I have already left my job at Grosvenor and Weiss because the firm has now been "arisiert" and they now have a Christian bookkeeper, who has been there since December. Otto is trying very hard to get to England in order to wait there whilst his affidavits are completed. He needs someone there to sponsor him. I would also like Fredy to go there, but he also needs a sponsor, as Mundy Sperber did....please be careful when you are driving a car. You will receive the little case, you will have to pay the freight Tampa-Miami, but nothing more. The typewriter is locked. On the right of the machine is a button which locks it. Do not force it or you will break it. I will send you the manual so you can see how to use it, in case you want to write.....

Aunt Fanny Feldherr wrote to us that she ought to receive a letter from you. I beg you to write to her because she is the only one who has a good heart as she wanted to do something for us if only she had the possibility. Her address is...1036, Bryant Avenue, New York...

How sadly this reads. My father must have written to many other relatives, and this letter onstrates their reaction, which would seem to have been silence.

Included were letters from mother and Otto.

From mother:

My dearest Erichl, I am filled with joy through your letters, this is the only joy one has today.....today is Purim. One should be happy. It does not make sense. You, my dear child, take care of yourself.....

You know that coming to the USA is not so easy for us, it seems the Vienna quota has been closed for two months and Fredy yearns to get away from Antwerp. It is not so easy. It would be wonderful to receive 2 permits so that Otto and Fredy could go to England

For several months father had not told Eric that he had lost his job in December, although he had written several letters to him in between. Perhaps he said nothing because he would have had to train the new bookkeeper, so probably remained until January or February 1939. Or perhaps, quite simply, he did not want to worry Eric, but then felt he had to share this blow. I knew of my father's situation through letters he wrote to me in Belgium.

Meanwhile my parents were able to tell Eric that Otto's departure was imminent.

April 5th 1939

....thank God you are well. We have received your letter. We hope you will³succeed in sending the missing documents for Otto. We cannot use these documents for Fredy because they are in Otto's name....We hear good things about you in a letter from Dr Georg Jaenner.....Be happy that you are where you are....What a joy it would be to see how you look....Otto will shortly go temporarily to England. And when his affidavit is completed he will then leave for America. Do you think, dear Eric, that we also will soon receive an affidavit?. Just in case, please write down our dates of birth:

David Knoller born 3rd January 1882 in Dynow, Poland

Marie Knoller born 5th August 1885 in Lemberg, Poland

In a further letter to Eric of April 1939 mother's despair breaks through.

....Fredy writes to us now every second day. He wrote to us that you have no reason to be upset with him⁴. He wrote to you on 2nd and has sent you birthday wishes, and has thanked you for his affidavit⁵. So peace...the Neufelds have left for Berlin, then Belgium, afterwards to London and then Australia. Lucky people! Anny Morgenstern and Mr Lastinger had their examination and will also leave soon. Hans Herr leaves also, soon we will be the last Jews in Austria.....

When I returned from Knocke with Kurt in August 1939, we went as usual to collect our weekly allowance from the Jewish Committee. One of the organisers was direct with me. "Money is short here. We're flooded with refugees. You simply have to move on." We were allocated to the Merksplas camp, near Mechelen (or Malline, in French).

It turned out to be a very agreeable place. I cannot recall whether Kurt came with me there. I now slept in a dormitory with other refugees.

Merksplas was located near the Belgian-Dutch border. The camp was about twenty miles from Antwerp. There were two large brick buildings at Merksplas called Pavillon A and B, each housing about 160 refugees. The dormitories - four in each Pavillon slept 40 of us. There was also an administration building, and a building where courses in metal

³ ed: this refers to a consular examination, which would either have been a documentary one, or perhaps a health check.

⁴ ed: this refers to Eric being upset thinking I had not wished him a happy birthday!

⁵ ed: this refers to my affidavit for America. As with Otto's affidavit there were certain other formalities to be gone through to finalize my emigration. The invasion of Belgium and my flight into France ended these hopes at that stage. It can only be a matter of speculation whether, if I had remained in Austria I might, ironically, have managed to finalize my papers and avoid what lay ahead for me.

work, poster making, shoe repairing, blacksmithing and tailoring were offered. I did a little tailoring, but spent most of my time practising with the orchestra.

Merksplas marked the end of my happy visits to the Aptes. To get to Antwerp I would have to have taken a bus or train to Turnhout, and another train from there to Antwerp. This was a time consuming exercise, and expensive. Also, the camp, being a camp, had its regime: one had to spend every night there.

Meanwhile the news from my parents was very bad:

Dear Erich

I wrote to you yesterday but today I must tell you that I have received the following letter from the Consulate in Vienna

*"David, Marie and Alfred Knoller,
Following your completed form No 41 we have to inform you that we have thoroughly investigated your case. We were unable to find any proof that you registered in Spring 1938. You are therefore not registered at the time given by you and we would advise you to complete the attached questionnaire, and return it to us....."*

You can imagine the anger and frustration. We are desperate and do not know what to do....There is no doubt, we know we registered together...What a misfortune. We have written to Mr D Apte, asking for his advice.

Our only hope was that we would soon be together with our children....Can you imagine when it would be our turn if we registered again? Can one live here that long?.....

(From Mother)

my eyes hurt from crying. How can one live without having any hope of being together with our children?

I received a similar, shorter letter from my parents. It was distressing in the extreme to read such a letter, and know one was helpless to do anything.

August 1939 saw the signing of the non-aggression pact between Hitler and Stalin. We speculated whether this would mean that Hitler would turn his gaze westwards.

My father wrote on 22nd October 1939 to Eric:

...This is a question of life or death. Mr Simpson should do all in his power to see that the complaint gets to Washington without delay. There should be no question of expenses, one should even engage a lawyer.⁶

A letter three days later shows his anxiety at the situation, but the small comfort of his official position remains with the Austrian Kultusgemeinde - the Jewish Community Centre:

25th October 1939

"Viele ~~muesen~~ sollen in das Land gehen wo ich geboren bin."

Many ~~are forced~~ are going to the country where I was born, but for the moment I am exempt because I am a public functionary.

Father would never allow a crossing -out to appear in a letter. So he clearly wanted us to know the truth with this piece of transparent self-censorship - the truth, and the lie he knew he must tell.

After the invasion of Poland on 1st September, everyone was convinced France and Belgium would be next. Two days later Britain and France declared war on Germany.

Through the Jewish Community Centre I had made contacts with some Jewish musicians when I had stayed with my cousins in Brussels, before I came to Merksplas. They played at wedding and other functions. I had made a little money, playing cello at two wedding receptions. Once, I played at a night club. A bass musician had fallen ill, and another musician asked me if I could stand in. I jumped at the opportunity. I couldn't play bass, but told him I could. I thought I could muddle through, especially as I knew I would not need a bow for jazz. I had improvised like this with Otto and Eric in Vienna.

I also played in the Merksplas orchestra during my time there. The ground floor of Pavillion A was used as the concert hall and theatre. Sometimes we went to Antwerp or Brussels on fund raising concerts for the Jewish Committee.

But another move for me was imminent. "We want you to go to Exaarde. This country is flooded with refugees. Everyone under twenty-one has to go there. It won't be bad, there is an orchestra, and I hear they need cellos." In February 1940 I found myself there.

Exaarde, an old military bastion with red brick barracks, was near Ghent. The dormitories were small - four sleeping to a room. I was at Exaarde for about three months before the invasion. And it is during this period that I suffered the extraordinary loss of memory I refer to in the introduction. At the end of September 1998, my cousin, Maxl, reminded me that he was at Exaarde with me. Just as I wrongly placed him by my side when I left Vienna, so have I reversed matters at Exaarde. He was there for those three months. He came to be there because in November 1939 the Belgian government decreed that each Jewish refugee family had to send one family member to Exarde or Merksplas. The Belgian authorities decided Maxl had to go to Exaarde, probably because he was only eighteen. Maxl now tells me that we played a lot of chess together, and he worked at his tailoring.

The head of Exaarde was a German Catholic refugee - sadly neither Maxl or I can recall his name. He had fled Germany because he was in danger of arrest for his anti-Nazi views.

The orchestra at Exaarde was inferior to that of Merksplas because all the players were young, but still, I enjoyed playing. Rehearsals were twice a week, and we played for a refugee audience every weekend. Sometimes members of Jewish organizations would attend, along with our sponsors, to keep up their willingness to support us.

⁶ ed: this is in regard to the mysterious disappearance of my parents' registration at the US consulate.

Thus, whilst Maxl's family, his parents Genya and Hermann and brother Leo and sister Rosi, lived in cramped style in Brussels along with Rosi's fiancé, Max Schaechter, Maxl and I remained at Exaarde, waiting on events. We did not have to wait long.

On the morning of 10th May 1940 the relatively peaceful three month period of Exaarde ended with a scream of sirens, tearing us violently from sleep. The radio told us that the German invasion of Belgium had begun.

There was no real leadership at the camp. And with no warning at all of the invasion, pandemonium followed. I remember the order "to pack essentials only." My cello was not essential, but how I hated leaving it behind! With it, I felt I was leaving part of myself, that part which tied me to my life in Vienna, with my parents. When I played, I thought of home, of them, of the Knoller trio.

We were sorted into groups of ten, and warned not to talk. The newspapers were full of stories of Fifth columnists, we were told, and we, as German speakers, would fall under suspicion. We made our way on foot towards France, comforting ourselves that we would be safe behind the great defences of the Maginot line. French boasts about its impregnability meant that we never conceived we would be in any danger, that the Germans would launch an attack through the Ardennes, rendering the Maginot lines useless.

The roads leading to France were crammed with a crawling mass of refugees. Many families travelled in cars and wagons which bristled with every conceivable possession. At least, I thought, I was on foot and travelling light. We were completely unprepared for the sudden appearance of a German plane, which strafed us. We tumbled into ditches, but many of the laden vehicles were destroyed. "Can't they see we are civilians?" people cried to one another incredulously. How ignorant we were, and what lessons about our enemy far worse than one this lay ahead! All I remember is walking blindly on, oblivious or unaware of any dead from the raid. We shared a single idea: let us only get to France.

We reached Tournai, a town near the French border. I remained with another boy from Exaarde, whose name I cannot remember; neither were we together for very long. Belgian and Jewish refugees alike thronged the station, in the hope of catching a train to France, or perhaps even to the coast, where there might be a boat to England. It didn't matter - whatever train arrived we would take it. But as we stood waiting in our many hundreds the dismal howl of the sirens started again. An air raid followed almost immediately. My companion and I looked around desperately for somewhere to hide and then, despite the mayhem, I somehow spotted a large concrete tube. We flung ourselves down and crawled into it as the bombs, which screamed horribly in the air, rained down and exploded violently. From this hiding place I had a tiny, keyhole view of the chaos outside. I was in terror and I am not ashamed to say that I wet my trousers. I saw a whole section of the station explode in flames. It seemed a long time before the all-clear sounded. We crawled out into a scene of devastation, coughing in the choking dust of pulverized masonry. Instead of the terrible sound of the bombs we now heard sounds more terrible, the moans of pain, and the anguished screams of women. Then we saw bodies, whole and dismembered, lying in pools of blood. I vomited what little food I had in me. I saw a woman wandering about, calling out for her family. I do not know whether she found any of them.

Another boy from Exaarde stumbled upon us, and the three of us left this appalling scene.

To this day I do not know what happened to anyone else from Exaarde, save for my cousin Maxl. Maxl had ended up in a group of refugees heading for Ostend, hoping to get a boat to England. The brave German catholic led this group. They got as far as Middelkirk, where they were halted by the gendarmes and housed in some army barracks. At some point in all this confusion the brave Catholic disappeared. With the arrival of the Germans a day later the Belgian gendarmes presented their conquerors with the refugees. The Germans, like the Belgians before them, did not ask anyone for identification - the Jewish

refugees from Exaarde of course had their passports with the large red "J" stamped on them. Maxl had no passport, only his Swiss birth certificate. The Germans asked the group very politely where they wanted to go. The Belgians had handed them over simply as refugees, Jews were never mentioned, and that was how they were treated. Maxl and many others said they wanted to go to Brussels, so the Germans put them on a train there. Maxl then made his way to the Jewish Community Centre. From here Maxl returned to the house in Brussels which he had shared with his family, only to find that they had abandoned it. Neighbours told him that the whole household had fled, saying they wanted to get to France. Maxl found his sewing machine intact, and found some work.

In May of 1939, after entering Holland again, now legally with affidavit in order, Otto left for England.

.....through some contacts of my father (he continues his letter of 1985 to Norbert) who worked in the "Kultusgemeinde" I was able to join many hundreds of young Viennese fellows and travel to Kent, England into the famous "Kitchener Refugee Camp" where I spent a full year until April 1940. During the year I formed an orchestra in the camp, became its pianist and conductor, gave many concerts throughout England for the "Military Auxiliary Pioneer Corps....."

There had been no controls at the Belgian-French border but as our straggling mass reached the outskirts of Lille, the first large French town, we came upon a solid blue cordon of French police. Everyone was asked for identification. Belgian citizens were allowed to pass. We three boys showed our passports, embossed with the large red "J." The police called an officer. "Nous Juive refugies. Hitler," we said in our pidgin French. They didn't seem to understand. Pointlessly, we repeated the words louder. All the police saw were German passports and so they arrested and handcuffed us as enemy aliens. At a nearby police station a German speaking policeman separated us and interrogated us individually. I desperately tried to explain my position, but my interrogator was unimpressed. "Jews or not, the Fifth Column are everywhere. All you Germans are suspects here." My friends fared no better. We were escorted to a school building and guarded by soldiers. Inside were other German speaking people. Some were not Jews, perhaps real Fifth Columnists. I remember meeting a Hungarian who had a German passport. All was confusion. We stayed there only for a few hours before we were crammed into trucks and driven away.

Where were we going? Of course, nobody could answer this question. We were inside the crowded truck for hours and when the doors were finally opened we found ourselves at a large railway station. It was Orleans. We were escorted to a platform and loaded onto cattle trucks. Cattle trucks; this was my first experience of travelling in one, and by no means the worst. After a day and a night, with a few stops to take on food, the train stopped. The sign said "St Cyprien." I did not yet know it but we were in the South-West of France. About all I knew was that it was June.

St Cyprien, some ten kilometres from Perpignan, was an internment camp, originally used for refugees from the Spanish Civil War of a few years before. Now we were to be interned there, as enemy aliens. The camp was guarded by Sudanese soldiers.

As soon as we arrived we were led to a large assembly hall where a French officer addressed the new arrivals - about sixty of us. "All of you are enemies of France. Any attempt at escape is punishable by death." This dire threat of the ultimate penalty may have been no more than fine words to impress us as it soon became clear that escape from the camp was a relatively easy matter. We were escorted to barracks, where the Jews amongst us found ourselves amongst the true fifth columnists: German Nazis. Aggressively they sang their German marching songs and boasted that Hitler would soon liberate them which, for all their idiotic ranting, was a true enough prediction. The Jews responded that Hitler would never win the war. They hurled the word "Jews!" at us and we shouted "Nazis!" at them. Fights broke out.

A delegation of Jews, of which I was a member, went to the camp commandant two days later to demand to be housed separately from the Nazis. Our spokesman, who spoke perfect French declared that we would never submit to sharing barracks with the Nazis, who had persecuted us in Germany. Eventually, perhaps as much for the orderly administration of his camp as for any humanitarian reasons, the officer yielded to our request. We now saw the Nazis only at roll call or when we ate, but kept apart from them.

There were between one and two thousand of us at St Cyprien, separated from the Mediterranean sea by barbed wire. Hygiene hardly existed so diarrhoea ran riot throughout the camp and, in addition, we were tormented by lice. All day long we sat around, talking in a desultory way about the military situation or, for amusement, playing a game which consisted of nothing more than throwing a stone at a line drawn in the sand.

On the beach was an odd sight about which we speculated. It was a huge, lone slab of concrete, serving no apparent purpose. Later we discovered that under it were

the bodies of thousands of Spanish republican refugees who had died during a cholera outbreak whilst interned at the camp. I needed no further evidence that this was a place to get away from. Once a week a space was cleared through the barbed wire so that we could briefly bathe for a while in the warm sea. This was the event of the week for us, but the guns of the soldiers were always on us and all too soon we were forced from the delight of the water.

I wrote to my parents and to Eric. My parents had been frantic about my whereabouts. Their postcard to Eric confirms that I had written to them shortly before 20th July (1940) - which is the date of their card to him. They write again to Eric one month later on 5th August.

We have received two cards from Fredl in St Cyprien, and even a letter. He tells us that he is in good health and not short of anything. He says he gets plenty of food. Also Uncle and Leo are there. Aunt Genya lives near Toulouse. Fredy asks us to write to him Post Restante Toulouse. I ask you, dear Eric, write to dear Fredy that we are well but temporarily unable to write to him (ed: because of the uncompleted peace negotiations between France and Germany). Tell him that Maxl remained in Brussels and is well and earns well. I have already written to Maxl that his parents are well.

The reader will have noticed the reference to Leo and Uncle Hermann in this letter. Again, my memory fails me completely over their presence here, and it is my parents' letter, quoting me, which patchily reminds me of that remarkable second reunion in this strange place with these members of my family, whom I had seen in Brussels not so very long before. Max Schaechter, (Rosi's husband) and his brother Avraham were also in the camp, both of whom I had visited in Belgium before the invasion. As foreign persons they, like me, had been arrested by the French as enemy aliens and sent to St Cyprien. Aunt Genya and Rosi had been sent to a camp for women in Southern France. Rosi bribed a guard and got herself out with Aunt Genya. Mother and daughter made it to Gaillac, in the Departement du Tarn, which was some 160 miles from St Cyprien. Nobody seemed to know where Maxl was, and assumed he was still in Belgium.

It was not long before cousin Rosi arrived and I was to discover she was a very strong-willed and resourceful woman. She was intent on getting her husband released and made a real nuisance of herself. First, she developed heat stroke and they sent her to the camp infirmary to recover. The camp commandant then wanted her to leave, but she steadfastly refused - unless Max was allowed to leave with her. As she was able to prove that Max would not be a burden on the state because she could provide for him, the commandant agreed to release Max. This success encouraged Leo to negotiate for his father's release. He succeeded, because Leo's passport proved he was born in Switzerland. The commandant washed his hands of all of them, and finally I was the only member of the family to remain. Leo took me aside just before departing. "Look, you know it's not hard to escape from here," he said, "we'll all meet in Gaillac," and he handed me a scrap of paper with the address.

One day a Sudanese guard, a particularly big man, beckoned to me. I went over to him and he offered me a piece of chocolate. "Come," he said, "I have more in my barrack." I was an innocent nineteen year old, and looked even younger. I couldn't believe my luck: a delicacy like chocolate could be exchanged for a lot of food. We went to the guard house, which was deserted. He led me to his room, where he showed me a big bar of chocolate. He handed this to me and, before I knew what was happening, he grabbed me and started fondling my private parts. I struggled and then struck him in the eye with the only weapon to hand, namely the chocolate bar. He let go, I kneed him in the groin and ran for my life. When I got back to my barrack I was dismayed to discover that I did not even have the chocolate bar.

A young Viennese called Sigi, who had arrived with me on the same train from Orleans, worked in the infirmary. "Listen, there are some cholera cases here," he confided. I thought of the concrete slab on the beach. I still feared retaliation from the guard after the incident between us, and now there was this. I invited some boy of my own age to join me in an escape, but he refused, so I made up my mind to go alone.

The soldiers were becoming uneasy around this time. It was clear that something was in the air and the grapevine soon brought news that France had fallen. The armistice was signed on 22nd June 1940 in the famous railway carriage at Compiègne. The German Nazis were released from St Cyprien, and only the Jews remained. Because St Cyprien was in unoccupied France, it fell under the control of the Vichy government, which came into being on 11th July 1940.

I escaped in mid-August at night-time and it proved as easy as Leo predicted. I simply crawled under some loose barbed wire. The war was over for France so perhaps we were more trouble than we were worth to the camp authorities.

It was pitch black and I kept looking nervously over my shoulder. A little later I heard the sound of an approaching vehicle, the lights of a car shone around the corner and I threw myself down until it was quiet again. I reached the outskirts of Perpignan, about ten kilometres from the camp, found a spot in a wood and fell asleep at once. I dreamt of the Sudanese soldier. He was pursuing me, his hands clutching chocolate bars. I woke just as he reached out to seize me.

It was a fiercely hot, bright day and I heard the sounds of busy traffic. I stood up, but with no clear idea of what to do. I was alone and very hungry but all I had was a little Belgian money. I walked into Perpignan and wandered aimlessly around there for a while, light from hunger and the gathering heat of the city. I was trusting in a miracle, and then a miracle happened. I saw a group of boy scouts. I had been a boy scout in Vienna and so I knew the international greeting. You place the thumb on the top of the little finger, keep the three remaining fingers in the air and lift the hand to the side of the head. We then used to say in German "All zeit bereit" which means "ready at all times." I approached these boys. Perhaps, for once, my young appearance was an advantage. I saluted them in the prescribed manner and explained in broken French that I had escaped Vienna when the Nazis marched in because I was a Jew. I was hungry, I told them, and had no money. Could they help me? One of the boys came forward. "Come with me," he said, and told me his name was Roger. He parted from his friends and soon we were walking down a tree-lined avenue. All the time Roger was talking animatedly, but I could only pick up the odd word or two, which seemed to be about scouting. I just nodded and gave an occasional murmur to show I was listening, whilst all the time my stomach growled in protest at its famished state. Soon enough Roger was leading me up the drive of one of the elegant houses in this avenue. I hovered at a polite distance whilst Roger spoke in a low voice with his parents in the doorway and indicated towards me. I could see his parents following his gaze and looking concerned. I was about to experience the kindness of strangers. His mother beckoned to me, embraced me as if I were her own son and took me into the wonderful cool of her splendid house. She sat me down in a room and soon appeared again bearing a laden tray. There was an omelette, orange juice, coffee, jam, bread and butter. It was a feast, I remember it to this day but I was too hungry to appreciate its taste.

Rogers' parents came to talk with me. What was I going to do? they wanted to know.

"I want to get to Gaillac, I have family there," I said.

"Stay with us for now, we'll sort your ticket out." They noticed how tired I was and insisted I lay down on a couch. I did so and fell asleep immediately.

When I woke up later that day I felt awkward because I had no way of repaying these kindly people. I managed to make them understand that I had to leave, to find my family, I said.

They nodded understandingly. Roger's mother disappeared and returned with a packet of fruit and sandwiches. How good it would have been to have stayed there with these people!

Roger's mother kissed me in farewell, and I shook hands with his father. Roger himself accompanied me to the station, where he bought my ticket. We embraced and I promised to remain in touch. But I didn't. What a pleasure, what a luxury that would have been! But keeping in touch is for those who have a home and all that means, or at least some sense of a future which is theirs. I had none of these consoling certainties which Roger took for granted. Yet to this day, for all that, I feel guilty that I did not send these kindly people even a note of thanks. On the train I ate the sandwiches and fruit.

I arrived in Gaillac, some 250 kilometres from Perpignan, at dusk. Unoccupied France was full of refugees and Gaillac, a medium sized town in the Tarn was no exception. In my halting French I got directions to the Bodek's house. And what an unexpected pleasure the sight of it proved to be, with its urns of flowers in a well-tended front garden. Aunt Genya cried with joy at the sight of me, but I could not help but notice how much older she suddenly looked. She had the warm, emotional character of my mother, though she was only my aunt by marriage. It was Hermann who was my true uncle, my mother's brother, but his nature was like my father's, stern and remote, the real Viennese paterfamilias. Now, he too looked haggard and anxious. We all lived under the strain of terrible uncertainty, but at their age this violent upheaval must have taken a terrible toll. The question that hung perpetually in the air like a dark cloud over us was: What might tomorrow bring?

A period of calm followed and in forgetful moments it was almost possible to think normality had returned to our lives. My cousin Rosi remembers me working for a farmer, me on the top of a wagon, pitchfork in hand

It was here in Gaillac that I purchased my very first set of false papers. Business in their production was, not surprisingly, brisk. For 100 francs, some Jewish refugees told me, you could buy some sort of identification card with your photo on it and the tricolour, which looked quite official. The Jewish Community Centre in Gaillac distributed small sums of money to refugees and when I had managed to save 100 francs I bought the card in a bistro from a Frenchman. It looked grand. The heading proudly declared *Sauvteur Medaille* with a replica of a medal and the tricolour emblazoned on the page next to my photograph. My new name was Robert Metzner, and my new place of birth, Metz. Underneath, in small printed letters was a declaration that the holder had saved a person from drowning. I felt sure the document would fool any German. I did not even consider whether it might fool the French authorities, who were not the enemy as far as I was concerned.

Yet I was soon restless. An idea was forming in my mind, absurd, foolhardy, but irresistible. I would go back into occupied Belgium to find Maxl and rescue my cello. Leo was desperate to find his brother, convinced he was still in Brussels. Belgium might have been occupied, but that country seemed to us no less safe a place than unoccupied France. Insecurity was our daily bread. We were all running, running, running, so that no idea seemed any less foolhardy than any other idea. We were homeless and above all, paperless, that worst of all situations. All I had were my false papers and my passport with "J" for Jew stamped on it. Leo was better off because, although he had an Austrian (German, after Anschluss) passport he had at least been born in Switzerland, a neutral country. Though, in my mind another, secret agenda was forming, which had little to do with cellos. Paris, city of my dreams, beautiful Paris, yes, but also licentious Paris, was so tantalizingly close to Brussels. It mattered nothing to me that the Germans occupied it.

Leo left for Brussels and I followed a few weeks later.

In order to cross the demarcation line at Limoges between the occupied and unoccupied zones one needed a pass called a *Laisser Passer*. The Jewish Community Centre in Gaillac did, at this time, communicate with Vichy, and passes could be obtained this way. I know I crossed into Belgium without difficulty, so I must have obtained a pass, but I have no recollection of this.

The train arrived in Brussels and I went straight to Maxl's address, and found both him and Leo well. Maxl had, of course, been separated from his family who had fled when the Germans invaded and he had been at Exaarde. The reader will remember Maxl's efforts to get to England through Middelkirk. He told me all about this now, and I him about my time at St Cyprien, not forgetting the episode of the Sudanese soldier and the chocolate bars.

Next, I made my way to Antwerp - there was a fast bus service from Brussels - to see the Aptes. There was no answer when I pressed that intercom button which had so impressed me a year before. I found the caretaker. "You won't find them, they are gone, they left before the Germans invaded." Just one year, and everything had changed. I was gripped with a sense of foreboding, with the terror of the impermanence of things. Had it all been a dream, then? The elegant Aptes, their beautiful apartment, the Friday evenings, the trip to Knocke in their fabulous car? Had any of this happened? Could the Aptes not, with all their wealth and status, have done anything against the tide of events? No, they were gone, as if they never had lived here but the apartment block stood and I thought, better if it had been bombed, like the station at Tournai because its unperturbed solid presence, in the face of all the fragility of human bonds, frightened me.

I made my way to the famous Diamond Club in Pelikan Street. These were the early years of the war, and the Jewish community still functioned in relative freedom in France and Belgium. "Jos Apte? They all went to England," the dealers told me. For these dealers it was business as usual and I still wonder at the fate of these less far-sighted people. They were curious about me and when I told them my story they referred me to the Jewish Community Centre, who again bailed me out with some money, food and a place to lodge. Later, these community centres were used by the Germans for the registration and then deportation of Jews.

I made my way to Exaarde the very next day. I found it deserted and ransacked. Nothing remained. And although I was here, in a country occupied by my enemies, I gave them no thought, but was only sad that I could not find my cello. It was as if the last tie to my home - those Knoller trio evenings after Sabbath dinner, the charity performances with my mother looking on with pride - had been obliterated in the pillage. I was utterly adrift.

Postcard 10th December 1940

Thank God we are in good health and we hope to hear the same from you. Unfortunately we have not heard from you for months. The waiting wrecks our nerves. I have written to you that Fredy has gone back to Brussels. He wrote to us that all his clothes and laundry and cello have disappeared. Who knows if the poor boy has something warm to put on in Winter. He wants to come back to his native town, however that is not possible.

My father's last sentence is witness to my homesickness but what I had written to prompt it is lost forever, and it is the sad irony of this story that the written words of my parents live on, whilst those of myself and my brothers, who survived, have been destroyed. Today, I cannot even recall the feelings behind my reported words.

With my remaining money I went to Brussels and bought a ticket for Paris, thrilled to be going at last to this mythical city of night-twinkling boulevards, tucked away bistros, and high-kicking show girls.

PARIS, ESCORTING THE ENEMY 1940-1943

I arrived at the Gare du Nord. Wherever I looked I seemed to see only German soldiers. But who were these others, in smart, silver and black uniforms with skull insignia on their caps? And those civilians in long leather coats mingling with them? I knew nothing yet of the Gestapo or the SS.

I took the Metro straight to Montmartre, because this was the famed red- light district of Paris and at once sought out the famous Follies Bergere, but when I found it, in Rue Richer, I saw several restaurants with the Star of David. I had stumbled across the Jewish district. There was one next to Follies Bergere, its sign saying “Restaurant Huberman,” which appealed to me, perhaps simply because it was set off the street in its own courtyard or, just as likely, because it was right next door to the famous night club. I was starving, penniless and lonely; the Star of David reminded me of my plight but also offered the comfort of the familiar. I walked across the little courtyard and felt reassured as soon as the owner of Restaurant Huberman greeted me inside. Mrs Huberman seemed to me to embody every aspect of the “yiddische mamme. ” She was round and short with a mass of grey hair. She smiled warmly. “Bonjour! What can I do for you, young man?”

Somehow, I made myself understood. I was a Jewish refugee, I explained..... from Vienna...I had seen the Magen David on her restaurant sign...I was hungry and without a penny.

Mrs Hubermann said: “Kannst du reden Yiddish?”

“Ja,” I replied, “aber mein Yiddish is a Mishmash Deutsch und Yiddish.”

She looked at me sympathetically, said “there’s someone I want you to meet,” and called out: “Otto, come!”

From behind the scenes, as if he were awaiting just such a signal that the coast was clear, stepped a young man. This was Otto Geiringer.

When I told Otto I was from Vienna, he shook my hand heartily then, as if that gesture of greeting were scarcely enough, embraced me, and finally bombarded me with questions. "I too am from Vienna," he said, the 9th district. I was at the Chajes Gymnasium when Hitler came. My parents are still in Vienna." So, it turned out, our backgrounds were almost identical. Where had I been to school? he asked. What synagogue had I attended? Were my parents with me? In normal circumstances Otto's very Jewish-looking appearance would not have been of any significance to me but now I found myself registering it almost automatically.

Mrs Huberman soon appeared bringing a plate of chicken soup with a piece of boiled chicken leg (pulke) in it. The sight, the smell, the taste of this food was all too much for me. "Madame Huberman," I managed to say, "this is my mother's Shabath food. I wish she was here to see me now." Large tears came to my eyes and I broke down. Mrs Huberman embraced me comfortingly.

I told Mrs Huberman my story: how I had made my way to Paris from the unoccupied zone, and that I had gone back into Belgium to find my cello and a few clothes. She shook her head in disbelief and said, "You were crazy to come here. What documents can you have?" I produced my papers: my German passport with the big red "J" stamped across it, and my bogus French papers with the tricolor and the name Robert Metzner. This last must have confirmed her opinion of me and she almost laughed. "The police here in this district won't be fooled by this for a second," she said. "They come here all the time, checking up. They take all the non-French away. They've always been anti-semitic, so you can take it from me they go about their job with enthusiasm."

I told Mrs Huberman I was looking for the Jewish Committee as I had no money. "Perhaps they will find me somewhere to live for a few days," I said.

I went with Otto to the address Mrs Huberman gave me, which was just a few streets away. On the way there Otto said: "Look, why don't you share my room for a while?" I readily agreed to this. The Committee gave me a little money, and a ration book.

I soon began to help out in the restaurant, though not as regularly as Otto, and I would give some of my ration tickets to Mrs Huberman when I ate there, which was often. ¹

It was on my very first evening there that Mrs Huberman introduced me to her daughter, Minna. She was an attractive Parisienne, with black hair and a marvellous figure and, more importantly, in her mid-twenties, so right out of our league. She had a very vivacious and friendly personality, but you could tell she missed nothing with those bright eyes. She was one of those tactile people who emphasise their remarks with a light touch of ones arm. It was part of her natural flirtatiousness but this gave Otto the idea that he had a chance with her, though I could not envisage this, as Otto was even younger looking and more immature than me, but I said nothing, flirting with her just as he did. Still, Otto was not a complete fool and in more rational moments sadly agreed that Minna's carefree laughter was occasionally gently aimed at us.

Otto's room, just around the corner from the restaurant, was on the top floor of a very old building. The window led onto a tiny balcony. He was pleased to tell me that in case the Germans ever came into the building we could easily climb from there onto the roof. The room was simply furnished with two beds, a wardrobe and washbasin. It was ideal for a couple of boys. Outside the door was a shrivelled old plant in a pot. We agreed that if one of

¹ Ed: my cousin Maxl assures me that during my stay at the Hubermans he and Leo, on route back to Gaillac from Brussels, visited me and ate with me "at a restaurant in the Rue Richer." This can only refer to Hubermans. Yet I have no recall of this visit whatsoever. In order for Maxl to have found me in Paris, we must have been in correspondence but, again, I do not remember

us happened to be entertaining a woman in our room then, in that happy event, we would lay this pot on its side. It was perhaps predictable that during the whole of my stay with Otto the pot remained upright.

Some days later Otto and I ventured into the red light district proper. This soon became a habit during our leisure time, that is when we were not helping out at the restaurant. We had started out dutifully enough by doing all the usual tourist things, viewing the Eiffel Tower and strolling along the Champs Elysees. We broadened our vistas somewhat and visited Montparnasse and the picturesque student's quarter at St Michel. But the truth was that we were hopelessly drawn to the red light district of Montmartre and soon gave up any pretence of wider cultural curiosity. Pigalle, with its prostitutes, its night clubs displaying tantalising photographs of topless female dancers, the sheer sounds and smells of the area, all intoxicated us. the uniformed doormen tempted the German soldiers in poor German: *Komm herein, sehen sie die nackten Mädchen*, they said. If the soldiers entered we caught a tantalising glimpse of the monochrome photographs transformed into animated full colour, there, on stage, as the bare-breasted girls kicked out their long legs to the accompaniment of the raucous music always to be heard along with the thronging activities of the narrow streets of Montmartre's sex industry.

In a short time we became youthful connoisseurs of the place. We distinguished between such down-market places as the Cabaret Eve and Paradis, the haunts of the German soldiery who had replaced the tourists of peaceful times, and the upmarket Bal Tabarin and Moulin Rouge with their velvet and gilt chairs and French clientele. We only wished we had the money for entry to any of these places, which was the costly price of a drink. But, despite our obvious youth, we were continually approached by the girls on the street corners, and temporarily enveloped in the aroma of their cheap, heady perfume. But the price they sought was always too high so for us it was all just a frustrating game.

this.

Evenings chez Hubermans, were bustling, friendly occasions. Mrs Huberman and Minna served in the restaurant. Mrs Huberman always wore a white apron around her wide waist, called all her customers by their first names and invariably asked after their families. There was indeed a Mr Huberman, a quiet, rather grey person beside his vibrant wife and daughter. He wore austere spectacles perched on the end of his nose, over which he peered at you. He seemed a much older person altogether. He sat at a table methodically issuing bills and collecting the takings, which he then carefully placed in a metal box.

Many years later, in extraordinary circumstances, I was to discover that Mr and Mrs Huberman were deported and subsequently perished. They probably fell victim to one of the earliest of the grand rafles of Jews because their restaurant was famous and so they were conspicuous persons. I cannot recall their first names; so, in consulting Serge Klarsfeld's Memorial to the Jews Deported from France 1942-44, I come across nine occurrences of the name Huberman, but I cannot say which of these they are. The earliest deportation of Jews from France was on March 27th 1942. The first Huberman deported was on that very first transport and the last on 27th July 1942

On some evenings, after the customers had left and the restaurant doors were closed, Minna, under the wistful gaze of Otto, would sometimes sing for us. We might harmonise along with her. She had - or had cultivated - a strong metallic soprano like Edith Piaff, and sung songs in that style.

I was far from home and so, in this familiar Jewish environment of music and traditional food, my thoughts often took me back to my parents. But what was I to do with such thoughts, which only tormented me? When I had arrived in Paris in December 1940 I had written to my parents with the address c/o the Jewish Committee, but I gave up as I did not hear from them, and the last dated letter from my parents was dated January 1941. There was only one further one, undated, and the fact of this lack of a date, given my

father's meticulous nature is, I feel, a significant indication of his frame of mind when he sent it.

Minna had a friend in the police, to me a typical-looking Frenchman in a beret, who would often come to visit her at the restaurant in the morning, well before lunch. He would eat there, naturally on a complimentary basis. I remember him as quite short, but broad-shouldered and I was not allowed into the restaurant when he was there. But he would warn Minna of any impending round-up of refugees. On such days we would lock up the restaurant. Other refugees and French Jews, too, similarly warned, would disappear from the streets.

It was on one of our forays into the red-light district that Otto and I began to notice a particular young man accompanying soldiers into the cabaret. At the door of the club, we observed, he would shake hands with his group and sometimes money passed into his hands. When he and the soldiers entered the night club I saw this man produce a slip of paper on which he scribbled before speaking to the doorman, who then took the slip. I became intrigued when I saw this performance continually repeated. After each of these transactions he returned and stood like a sentry at the entrance of the Metro Pigalle. On one occasion we managed to get near enough to hear him talking to the soldiers in German. I heard him promise to bring the soldiers to private shows, where they would be able to see thirty-two positions of love making. I have never forgotten that number: *thirty-two*, nor the way in which Otto and I looked at each other in wild and perplexed speculation as he said it. There was something about the exactitude of that number which made its promise seem both real and fantastic at the same time. Such shows, this man elaborated, were very secret and took place only in private homes. I could see that this young man knew his business and I promised myself to come back to Pigalle, on my own, to talk to him. He was tall, with curly hair, and had Mediterranean features. He had an accent. I thought that he might be a refugee, even Jewish. I was anxious to discover all this and, besides, I had so little money.

I ruthlessly excluded Otto from my plans. His naïve nature was bad enough but his Jewish appearance, which I had noted at our first meeting, was the thing which, in my eyes, counted heavily against him. I fear I had become as discriminating as any Nazi in this respect and the direction I was about to take would remove me for a long time from life amongst Jews.

Perhaps it is a measure of the guilt I have harboured for years, but not acknowledged, that I have only recently sought to discover the fate of Otto Geiringer. It was not a difficult task. Serge Klarsfeld's book, which I have owned for many years, has the answer:

Transport No 50. Otto Geiringer. Deported from Drancy
4th March 1943. Date of Birth 14/2/24.

So Otto was nineteen when he was deported and seventeen when I first met him. I do not know if he survived.

My plans were very speculative when, the very next evening, I took the Metro on my own to Pigalle amongst a crowd of German soldiers with faces set and eager for the night life of Paris. I emerged with them, saw the big, bright neon lights of the "Cabaret Eve" across the square, and walked over to it, stood again at its doors gazing at the show case window, with its photographs of scantily-clad girls, as once again, the doormen tempted the soldiers in. Some laughed, already drunk, and moved on but others entered.

It wasn't long before I spotted the same Mediterranean looking young man taking soldiers into a cabaret. When the young man returned to the entrance of Metro Pigalle, I approached him. I excused myself politely, and spoke to him, amazed at my own boldness. "Look, I am a refugee from Metz. I am penniless here in Paris. My German is very good, so I think I can be of some use to you. I admit I've watched you and understand how you make a living. To be frank I need some money. My name is Robert."

He looked me up and down, nodded, giving away nothing. He was a sharp-featured fellow I could now see at close quarters, with sunken cheeks, and smartly dressed in a suit and tie. "Come with me," he said, just three words, but perhaps the password to the new life I sought. He led me to a nearby bistro. He ordered wine, and commenced negotiations.

"My name is Christos," he began, "I come from Greece." "Introducing you to the clubs is worth a lot of money, they give a percentage of their take to the introducer."

"Well, you know I have no money, but how about me giving you a percentage of anything I make?" I suggested, again hardly able to believe that this was Freddie Knoller, the adolescent of nineteen years old, speaking. But Christos seemed to consider this seriously. He nodded again and our deal was struck.

We got down to the mechanics of our arrangement. "I start work at seven in the evening. I usually go on to three in the morning," said Christos. How we would collect our commission? And how I would take it to him? I wanted to know. We sorted these matters out easily enough, but then Christos leaned forward meaningfully and said, "Just a little warning." With his hard experienced manner he seemed a much older person in my eyes, but it turned out that he was only two years older than me. "If you try to cheat me," he went on, "I have certain friends who will take care of things.....you won't be seen in Pigalle after that, I can tell you." I earnestly assured him he would never regret trusting me.

"Still," he went on, "if we become friends...I won't mind you having some of the action.....there are so many soldiers around here, I can't handle them all."

Despite his tough talk, I felt I could like Christos. More importantly, I sensed I could trust him, but for now I just thanked him profusely for the chance he was giving me.

We drank some more, and the conversation came around to the question of accommodation. "I'm sharing with another refugee," I told him.

Christos thought for a moment. "Look, " he said, "why don't you share with me? I've got a room around the corner from here, small, but fine for two. You'll have to pay half the rent of course, once you start earning."

I accepted at once. Christos's place was nearby on the top floor of a hotel on Rue des Martyrs and, once he had shown it to me, he gave me a spare key.

I went back to Hubermans to spend the last night in the room I shared with Otto, this new key in my pocket, this key to my future. I was too excited to sleep much and occasionally looked towards the innocent shape of Otto in the bed beside me. He worked in the restaurant at lunchtime, I thought, so that would be the ideal time to leave.

I ask myself now: did I feel some guilt about my intended action? And the answer is that I do not believe so. The burden of being a Jew amongst Jews was something I was glad to shrug off.

The next day I packed the few things I had in my suitcase and left, leaving only the spare key on the table, but no note.

So it was that in this furtive manner that I abandoned my new friend and the kindly Hubermans, and separated myself from my Jewish identity. It would be the Nazis who would, in a few years time, repatriate me to that identity. For now, I was about to enter the privileged world of non-Jews.

Within a few months of my leaving Hubermans, in May 1941 to be precise, the infamous rafles of Paris began, when foreign Jews were rounded up by the gendarmerie, who proved every bit as zealous as Mrs Huberman had

said they were. All these terrible events I watched from the sidelines, in genteel guise.

Christos and I had agreed to meet again on Place Pigalle and he wasted no time when we did. After dropping off my suitcase in his room we were back on the street and heading for the clubs. I had initiated this new life of mine, but I was dazed at how quickly it was taking shape.

Our first stop was the Cabaret "Paradis," on Rue Fontaine. Christos introduced me to the doorman and then the manageress. My customers, she told me, would be noted under the name of Robert and I would receive five percent of any moneys which these clients had spent. Next, my new friend took me to a brothel, at No 122, Rue de Provence, a narrow street lined with tall buildings. This was, I learnt, a famous venue. There was a large area where the girls were seated at the bar and at tables, drinking with German officers and civilians. These girls wore see-through blouses, some casually exposed their breasts and even their lower parts. Christos merely laughed as I reddened in embarrassment. "You better get used to seeing naked girls, if you want to do this work," he said. I learnt the lesson that it was one thing to indulge an adolescent fantasy, another to see the reality so casually, almost brutally displayed. I was introduced to Madame Fouquet, the owner of the brothel, and we made a similar arrangement. I was to become very familiar with No 122 and, after I had accustomed myself to the sight of the half-naked girls, I was able to take in the gaudy splendour of its décor. Every room of pleasure was a foreign region; there was the Spanish room, the Chinese room. On this day the manageress showed me the Arabian room. A baldachin of heavy gold drapes cascaded luxuriously around the large bed, the walls were frescoed with belly dancers; lights, encrusted with coloured glass, hung from a golden chandelier. Such gaudy magnificence dedicated solely to the pursuit of pleasure lifted me onto a plane of prospects as remote as the region it depicted.

For all that I had abandoned the Jewish world you only have to turn left out of No 122 Rue de Provence and walk along that straight, narrow street to come to its continuation which is Rue Richer, where Hubermans was.

On a recent visit to Paris I revisited for the first time these streets which had played such a part in my life some sixty years before. Rue de Provence now has a large supermarket near to Madam Fouquets, so I expected No 122 to have been swallowed up in its sprawl. But no, there it was, the number displayed above the large double wooden door, though I cannot say if it is that same double door of my youth, as similar as it looks. I stood and gazed at it for a while before turning back down Rue de Provence and stopping on the corner of Rue Montmartre, before crossing into Rue Richer, to admire and browse in a beautiful old confiture and wine shop, which certainly must have existed during my time here, though I do not remember it. I lingered in this shop, hesitating, perhaps, before once again entering the Jewish district., but when I did I discovered that Rue Richer remains still a sort of Jewish quarter, though much reduced, with a few Jewish shops, all closed as it was a Saturday. The Folies Bergere, which had stood on the left hand side of the street, has, of course, gone and of Hubermans there was no trace either. There was a wide hinged metal gate next to the anonymous looking building where Folies Bergere had stood. Perhaps, behind this gate, there was a courtyard, like the one in which Hubermans had been. There was no way of knowing. The impenetrable metal hid its secret entirely, and after standing there for a while I turned back along Rue Richer.

The next introduction of Christos was different, as it was to a private house, this one in the Rue de Navarin, near Pigalle. Here, the Madame explained, the client may see two

Christos' next introduction was different, as it was to what he called a "private house," this one in the Rue Navarin, near Pigalle. Here, the Madame explained, the client may watch two women performing sexually with each other and, for an extra sum, could enjoy himself after the show with them. "Don't bring German civilians here," Christos cautioned me. A "private house" I now learnt, was a euphemism for an unregistered one, and a civilian might be a Gestapo man. These shows, Christos later explained, were particularly expensive. Here was a place to bring officers or perhaps soldiers who seemed to have money to spend. Our commission here was ten percent.

I lay awake that night, my head spinning . Next to me, in a similar single bed, with a similar rust coloured bedspread, slept Christos. I marvelled at how different this room was to the one I had so recently shared with Otto! - that poor attic dwelling, the walls stinking of moisture from what must have been the porous roof. And how untidy I and Otto had been there, with clothes left lying around and beds unmade! We hadn't cared; we were boys, used to being looked after and, in truth, it was a luxury as refugees just to have a roof over our heads. Perhaps, also, we had not tried to make a home out of a place we might have to flee at any moment. Christos' place, though not so different in size to my former one, seemed to reflect his lawful presence in Paris. There was the small homeliness of the blue and rust cloth cast over the table, and the three chairs around it, as if a visitor might call and occupy the third. A chest of drawers stood against a wall, with a jug and bowl for washing, (though our water came from a sink in the corridor). One feature of this room I remember in particular. It was a large print, which looked sixteenth century to me, depicting people picnicking under a blue sky. I admired the skill of the artist in the intricate rendering of the cloud formations and would often gaze at this unperturbed, timeless scene of quiet enjoyment as if I might, by focussing intently enough, enter its world.

Christos took a pride in the appearance of his room. There were rules. We could not leave without making the beds and: "We take it in turns here to clean and dust," he informed me, alerting me to another rule.

Though I was rudderless, virtually friendless, and in constant danger of discovery, I was also elated with the freedom I was experiencing years before I expected to. I had found my ingenuity, my independent spirit, and I recognized with pride how the boy I was, who had gone nowhere without his parents, had carved out for himself this undreamt of new adventure. I should have been a college boy; instead I was a sort of pimp. Of course, apart from the fumbling experience with our maid and the disastrous one with the prostitute in Antwerp, I had had little sexual experience. But real sexual experience, I was sure, could only be just around the corner.

I took up my post for the first time at the head of the Metro Pigalle, just as I had watched Christos do before me. As neon asserted itself against the failing light of day I waited for the soldiers, my first soldiers, to appear. Soon came the clang of boots on the iron-lipped steps. I felt strangely unafraid at this sound and merely watched the soldiers as they rose in a mass to street level, their uniforms smart grey and green in the austerity of the wartime city. I myself was sober, almost drab in a plain suit and tie. My one outstanding feature was my perfect German. As I approached my first target the patter came to me with suave assurance, as if I had been performing it all my life.

“Guten Abend, Meine Heeren.”

They paused, and looked me over, a smiling, clean cut, fair-haired man. In perfect German I offered my services as a guide to Paris night-life.

“Gentlemen, I will lead you to such pleasures as you have only imagined. I will take you to shows where nude girls will dance for you. I will find you the most passionate girls ever. I will show you the Paris of your dreams.”

The soldiers asked me, “How do you speak such good German?”

The lie came smoothly to my lips: “I come from Alsace where everybody speaks German. My own father is German, my mother French. I went to school in Vienna. And my name is Robert.”

The soldiers seemed pleased. I was a rare thing to these conquerors, a loyal, welcoming friend. They began to trust me. Why not? – I looked like them and spoke like them. Besides, with the promises I had made them, they wanted to trust me.

“Follow me, gentlemen,” I said.

And they did, as would hundreds of others of the German military for the two years I worked in Paris.

Their eyes widened at the door of the Cabaret Eve with its salacious, tinted photographs of the dancing girls. Sometimes they got no further than here, and might reward me with a handful of francs. Cabaret Eve was not my preferred destination for the soldiers. I wanted to manoeuvre them further along, to Le Paradis, in Rue Fontaine, where my commission was higher than in other places. The commissionaire at Cabaret Eve smiled at the soldiers entering his establishment and marked me down for a commission. I moved on with those I had retained, along the narrow, cobbled street of Rue Pigalle towards Le Paradis. There was temptation all along the way. Almost every doorway belonged to a nightclub, marked by illuminated display cases of high-kicking, scantily-clad girls, whilst ladies of the night all along the streets called out or frankly accosted us. But I usually succeeded in getting my group to Rue Fontaine at the bottom of Rue Pigalle where frenzied music spilled out from Cabaret Le Paradis. The doorman there permitted my soldiers a tantalizing view of a chorus line of dancing girls performing on stage. Cabaret Le Paradis was not a high-class place but a spot for foreign visitors, now replaced by the invader. As we entered, my clients were immediately surrounded by the girls and led to tables by the stage. I gave a slip of paper with my name on it to the commissionaire. On it he marked down the number

of soldiers I had brought. Then he noted the table number where my soldiers were sitting, usually already drinking beer, whilst the girls who had joined them took professional sips at their champagne cocktails. Sometimes I would get another gift of francs from the soldiers, a smile of gratitude, a slap on the back and told what a fine fellow I was.

By this time I had moved into my own room. It was called Hotel du College Rollin, in the Rue de Douai. This was one of the many small hotels in Pigalle where prostitutes took their clients, but to me it was home and, like Christos, I now took a pride in the appearance of my room and became tidy. Perhaps I was beginning to feel established. Apart from the fact that my room was blue, rather than the rust colour of the room I had shared with Christos, there was little to distinguish them.

On that same recent visit to Paris, I was able with certainty to recollect on which side of the road it had been, and where it had been. The shutters in the four storey windows, the windows themselves were all familiar, but the hotels under these windows had different names, and the kindly owner of one of them know nothing of my hotel.

On 14th May 1941 the streets were suddenly alive with gendarmes. It was the first *rafle* of Paris. "They're rounding up Jews," Christos said. Others would follow. Before my eyes I saw Jews being rounded up like common criminals and herded into police vehicles.

Since arriving in Paris in December 1940 I had only written to my parents once. I was worried about disclosing my presence in Paris, and so my true identity, as I knew that letters were read and censored. In fact my parents were deported to Theresienstadt on 2nd October 1942, before I left Paris. Between their penultimate letter (the last being undated) and their deportation, where they were held will probably always remain a mystery. They may never have received my one letter and so may never have known I was in Paris.

That penultimate letter is dated January 8th 1941. They wrote to Eric:

Many months have passed and still no letters from you.....We want to tell you that, thank God, we are in good health. Regarding Freddy we have told you before that he went back to Brussels. We have already received two letters from him. He writes that he is, thank God, well. He was even able to get most of his things back but unfortunately his cello is lost....He also briefly visited Antwerp where he visited Hansi Spitzer, who is married to Torczyner. She wrote to us that Freddy has become very grown up...May God protect him.

It is strange, too, to pick through these letters and find my memory a complete blank over certain matters reported by my parents to Eric. For example, though I knew Hansi Spitzer from Vienna, I have no recollection of visiting her in Antwerp. It is so strange that Hansi wrote to my parents, and my parents to Eric, and a letter reporting my visit returns like a homing pigeon to me, who has no recollection of the events described.

Another oddity of this particular letter is that my parents make reference to my having been able to recover “*most of (my) things.*” (italics mine). Yet, in their letter of 10th December 1940 dated less than a month before, part of which is reproduced earlier in this book, they state (quite accurately) that *all* my “clothes and laundry and cello (had) disappeared.” I cannot explain this discrepancy; and put it down to the desperately confused and anxious state of mind that they were in.

The German persecution of the Jews had driven me from Austria, then Belgium and now here in France it was even worse. I wondered in astonishment how the French, a conquered people, could do the dirty work of their enemy in rounding up Jews. Every Jew I saw arrested was, in my mind, either myself or my poor parents and so the burden of my concealed origins became heavier and heavier to bear.

One day Christos and I were sitting in the bistro we frequented, and I was heavy with the wine which contributed to a confiding mood. The restaurant was almost empty. "Why are you so miserable?" Christos asked. My relationship with him had long ceased being merely a business one. We were companions. I trusted him completely, but I would not at first tell him what was troubling me. In his gentle way he persisted. "I am your friend. Let me help you."

I had a most anxious decision to make, but his words so touched me that tears, assisted by alcohol, sprang to my eyes. "Christos," I said, "thank you for being my friend and for wanting to help me. I will tell you why I am crying and so unhappy. I am putting my life in your hands by telling you this - I am a Jew, a refugee from Hitler and my real name is Freddy Knoller." I looked at Christos to see his reaction.

My friend fell silent and then gave a deep sigh at the enormity of this problem. "What are we going to do with you?" he finally managed to say. "What papers have you got?"

I showed him my fake Sauvteur Medaille card, and told him about my German passport with its red "J" for Jew stamped on it. He now became very angry. "What do you think you are doing?" he railed at me, "going up to the Boches with nothing more than *this* ? Or this, this tinpot French forgery which will fool nobody....are you mad?" He answered his own question. "You must be." His anger was, no doubt, motivated as much by concern over his own position as about mine. "Do you want to rot in jail?" he carried on. "If the French police find you out, they'll hand you over to the Gestapo." He shook his head but, as was his way, he soon softened. "Well, you have guts at least, even if no brains," he said. He would try to sort something out. And so my friend Christos adjusted to the fact that I was not Robert, who spoke German because he was from Metz, but a Jew called Freddy a refugee from Vienna.

I never had cause to regret confiding in Christos. Onto the scene came Pierre Marcello, a rakish, good looking young Corsican with a sideline - one of many, I was to learn - in false papers. I had to give him all the money I had saved and promise him to pay the rest in instalments.

Pierre supplied me with a French I.D. card. With this professionally produced document I was a much more convincing "Robert Metzner," born in Metz. This Alsatian origin, as I had already proved with the soldiers, lent plausibility to my German accent. With these papers I could also obtain rations and register officially in my hotel.

And so my life on the streets continued and I would have been happy in this work for the rest of the war, but it was not to be.

In refining my procurer's skills, my preferred quarry soon became the German officer class, who could afford the services of Madame Fouquet's exclusive establishment in Rue de Provence. It needed the same perseverance I exercised with the common soldiery to steer them through the temptations along the way. The beckoning prostitutes who lined the streets, their legs dyed a shade of tan in the wartime absence of silk stockings, all knew me, and they begged me to introduce them to my friends, offering me a percentage. "Maybe later," I said in their patois, with an easy smile, but to the officers, in German, I said, "these girls are not clean." How duplicitous I had become. But my words usually did the trick, until the next corner, where similar offers were made. I then had to negotiate the officers past the Bal Tabarin, that superior venue where, most importantly, no commissions were on offer.

I

Finally we arrived at Rue de Provence, my precise destination being No 122. It was at this point that my party normally seemed to have doubts about my judgement. This was understandable, because the great oak door and shiny, small brass plaque on the wall with the plain name Madame Fouquet gave a very sedate impression after the garish offerings of Pigalle. "Just trust me," I urged my now subdued group.

I rapped on the door, and a small concealed square panel in the centre slid back. The eyes of Madame Fouquet looked out. *Robert! Entrez! Entrez!* The solid door opened at once. And then behind me came the gasps of surprise and pleasure. *Shoene Madchen! Sehr schoen!* Straight ahead, perched by a bar, were a dozen or so of the beautiful young women who, clad as revealingly as always, smiled at the new arrivals.

Madam Fouquet offered her new arrivals cognac and champagne. The officers in their stiff grey uniforms were ushered to one of the low round tables and cocooned in the luxurious armchairs. The girls did not pester the men in No 122; they waited to be chosen. The men slowly gave themselves up to the ambience of the salon, whilst Madame Fouquet, a flame-haired woman always in long, decorous skirts, and striking-looking even in her forties, fussed over her new clientele. She joked and flirted with them, teasing her curls, which set her many bracelets in tinkling motion.

Her establishment was something to dwell on, as I have said earlier. Here and there were great vases of flowers. Paintings of Folies Bergeres style chorus girls dotted the walls. Behind the bar a vast mirror softly reflected the scene. The baroque gilded ceiling would not have disgraced a Venetian palace. In a corner a gramophone crooned love songs.

The officers assessed the girls over the rim of their champagne glasses and the girls returned their gaze until selected. Sometimes I was invited to join the men. I sat, smiled, and drank dutifully, but never for very long. We toasted our new-found friendship. I did not even enjoy champagne, but I earned a percentage of every franc they spent on it. They boasted of their campaigns, of course, declaring that only Britain resisted and she could not hold out for long. We toasted their victories. When the officers made their selection of the girls it was time for me to depart, sometimes with a wad of francs. "Robert you are a great guy, a true friend," they said.

From 29th May 1942, when French security matters were transferred to the SS, the Jews of France were forced to wear the yellow star. So, for the first time, I saw this emblem of identity and I felt flooded with shame when I saw Jews so distinguished, whilst I, incognito, courted the enemy and took its money.

I remember on one particular day I was leading a group of officers along Pigalle to Rue de Provence when two young men walked along the pavement towards us wearing the yellow star. As soon as they saw us they crossed to the other side of the road. I felt this as a terrible rebuke. I was once again seized with that urge to declare myself, to live again as a Jew, to be Freddie Knoller once more. As my party approached Madame Fouquet's I understood how utterly alone I really was. My thoughts painfully returned to my family. In Paris, I was now cut off from my Jewishness. In opting for my life with Christos I did not visit the Hubermans. At first this may have been guilt over the way in which I had parted from them and from Otto, but with the coming of the rafles it would have been dangerous to go into the Jewish quarter anyway.

Further rafles followed, on a larger scale: there was the grand *rafle* of Jews on July 16th and 17th 1942, when I saw the streets flooded with gendarmes arresting those with the yellow star. But I was not to know the destination or fate of these rounded up Jews, and others before them, until I became one of their number a year later. Neither was I to know that, whilst I lived in Paris, the second deportation of Jews from the Vichy camp of Gurs through the Drancy camp in Paris and then to Auschwitz on 12th August 1942, contained my Uncle Hermann and Aunt Genya. They were two out of the one thousand on that transport. Jews in France were always deported in numbers of exactly one thousand.

But in my picaresque world life carried on. There were sexual adventures I could never have experienced at home. I was out of my depth, of course, and trouble often followed. I had casual relationships with some of the

waitresses and dancers. I suppose my association with Christos and Marcello leant me a certain glamour, but I was still a boy in a man's world.

Two adventures I remember well. I firstly became friendly with a dancer at the Moulin Rouge called Yvette. I used to meet her at a bistro on Rue Lopic, where Christos and I often ate. Yvette was a flirt and so I responded. Christos warned me that she had a Corsican boyfriend, but I took no notice. We met and had drinks, no more than that, but one day I was collared in the street by the Corsican, a mean-looking character, who warned me off in no uncertain terms.

Her successor was Monique, the blonde, beautiful cabaret singer, who performed at Le Paradis and other clubs. I used to listen to her practising in the afternoons, accompanying herself on the piano. Her voice had an extraordinarily wide range. I was thrilled when she accepted my slightly nervous invitation. We met that same evening in my favourite bistro in Rue des Martyrs. Over aperitifs she told me she had just ended a relationship with an actor when she discovered he had been two-timing her. She was very upset about it. She should have known better when she discovered his first lie. They had talked about marriage, she told me..... then she found out he was already married, even if he was, at least, separated. So, a wife, a lover....and another. It was all very complicated, but I gazed at her sympathetically, seeing my opportunity. I liked her very much, I told her. "We are both musicians, sensitive people," I said. We began to meet and have lunch together. I can still hear the melody of the current big hit "J'attendrais," which I harmonized with her.

It was after her show one evening that she invited me back to her flat in Rue de Montmartre. For two months we shared a tender relationship, though I was always on guard, using a condom not only for hygienic protection, but to hide my circumcision. Even in one of the many pissoirs Paris had at that time I was careful about showing myself, always glad if the place was empty.

One day Monique asked me not to meet her because she had been asked to sing at the Officers Club in Versailles by a German officer. The money was too good to refuse, she said, but I could see that her eyes had gone distant and were already sparkling with the reflected treasure of other, more desirable options. I forgot that I was just a boy, and only knew that I was losing her, and was jealous. I told her not to go to Versailles, but she insisted she would. Angry words were exchanged and we parted on bad terms. Monique and I still saw each other after that, but I now had to endure her rapturous accounts of a certain German officer who showered her with gifts of jewellery, nylons and money. I was just a boy, she implied, not a man, and she a woman of the world. Hadn't it been clear to me from the start that our relationship was bound to end sooner or later? Couldn't I not now remain her young friend?..... Then, Monique disappeared from the Paris scene completely, at least, from my Paris, and I have no idea what became of her.

Well, I thought, trying to console myself, I was at least an accepted part of the night-life scene, greeted cordially wherever I went, in brothels, night clubs and bars. And I was offered sex by some of the girls from Rue Pigalle but, of course, was never tempted, thinking of all the sheer numbers of men - and particularly Boches - that they must have got through in a single day.

Pierre Marcello, who had got me the false papers, had become a close friend. The three of us always met at a certain bistro in the Rue de Martyrs. Pierre was a real pimp with quite a stable of prostitutes. He hated the Bosch, he regularly declared at our bistro evenings; "I'll take their money, no trouble, but collaborate with them?" He made an expression of disgust. On another evening he leant forward confidentially across the table. "I have some very good contacts in the Resistance" he said in a low voice. We, he intimated, should find out as much as possible from our clients: where they are stationed, the name of their unit, its strength, and any other information which might interest his friends.

I did my best to oblige, thinking back to the odd tit-bits I had picked up from officers I had taken to Madame Fouquet's. I hated the Germans at least as much as he did, and for the most personal of reasons. One day, after I had approached two German officers at my normal post they invited me to stay with them for a drink. We ended up staying together the whole night, going from one night spot to another, naturally only to places where I had commission arrangements. The two officers drank a lot and after some time they became quite talkative. They were in charge of a unit near Versailles, they told me, specialising in finding "terrorists and Communists." They told me they were looking for a Communist cell in a small town near Versailles, which was creating a lot of problems for them, sabotaging German trucks and cars by slashing their tyres. They confided in me not only because they were drunk, but also because of my story of coming from Alsace Lorraine, and declaring myself a loyal German, very pleased that Alsace was once again part of Greater Germany.

The next day I rushed to meet my new friend Pierre, bursting with the news of my meeting with the two officers, and gave him as much detail as I had. Pierre was very excited when he heard my report. He asked me to meet him again in our usual bistro in the evening. There, he introduced me to a very distinguished gentleman, by the name of Andre and I had to repeat my whole story about the two officers. He listened intently and asked many questions, some of which I was unable to answer, but he urged me to continue to be on the lookout for more information. Every small detail, he stressed, could be very important for France. He congratulated me and told me to be careful and to tell Pierre anything which might be useful to the Resistance movement. I felt exhilarated because I was, in my own small way, personally fighting the Germans.

One night I was as usual at Metro Pigalle when a German civilian approached me and asked me how to get to Rue du Victor Masse. I knew that in this small street several private shows were located and that there were bars frequented by homosexuals. When he heard that I spoke German, he invited

me for a drink and I took him to one of my clubs. His name was Hans Kessler. Naturally I was apprehensive because, like the Gestapo, he was not in uniform, though he did not wear their black leather coat. He told me that he supplied the Army with all kind of goods and it was his job to find the right merchandise either officially or in the black market and that at that moment he was trying to buy five thousand aluminium buckets. I found all this very interesting because my Corsican friend Pierre was very much involved in the black market and making a lot of money out of it. Perhaps I could also make my fortune in this way. I was becoming an entrepreneur.

Hans was a very gentle fellow, softly spoken and not at all like the German soldiers I had been meeting in my job. He was intelligent and well spoken. He did not want to talk about the war but only regretted that so many young men had to die. I was trying to interest him in the entertainment I could provide, but he dismissed all this. He was not very interested in nude cabaret shows, he explained, but was delighted to have met me, a French man who spoke German and he asked me about my own background in Alsace Lorraine, and also about my friends. At first I had not understood his drift until he frankly spoke about the friendship between men and men and finally he asked me if I would stay with him because he liked me. I told him that I would gladly be his interpreter and introduce him to places where he could find like-minded men, but that I was not a man to have relationships with men. I also warned him that I would leave his company immediately if he should try to approach me sexually. This may seem a strong reaction on my part, but in my mind remained the memory of the guard at St Cyprien. This was the image I had of such friendships and, extraordinary as it may seem to modern people, I had not even known of the existence of homosexuality until that time. But Hans, that model of civility, was not in the least put out. On the contrary, he thanked me for being so straightforward with him and assured me that he respected my feelings. Homosexuality was outlawed in Germany, he explained and so we therefore would have to be extremely careful with whom he associated. The address, he told me, which a friend had given him,

was supposed to be a bar where young men gather. Would I, at least, be willing to go there with him and act as his interpreter?

We left the cabaret and went to the address in question. It was a bar full of men. We sat down and had a drink, then I went to speak to the owner. I told him I was a guide for the night clubs in the Pigalle district and that I was with a German who had been given this address hoping to meet young men. I emphasised that I was only his interpreter. I also pointed out that my client seemed to have a lot of money and that he was very generous. The owner of the bar suggested that we come back the following evening and that he would arrange something for him. Hans agreed to this and asked me to meet him again the next day and to continue to be his interpreter. He took out his wallet and gave me quite a large sum for my services.

When we parted company I found Christos and Pierre. I told them of my adventure with Hans Kessler and Pierre assured me that, with his contacts, he could find Hans Kessler the five thousand buckets and that I would, of course, be financially involved in the transaction. He would get a sample bucket and the price per item.

The next day I met Hans, told him I thought I had a source for the buckets, and we went together back to the bar. The owner took us to the first floor apartment and introduced Hans to two good looking young men. As one of the men spoke some German I decided to leave. I made an appointment with Hans for the next day and arrived, aluminium bucket in hand. He seemed more than pleased with it, we agreed a price and he gave me an official-looking order form with an address. Delivery was to be within two weeks. We had a drink in a bar and he told me how grateful he was that I was able to make the contact with the two nice young men and he presented me with an envelope for that introduction, thanking me in his courteous way for my friendship. That was the last time I ever saw him. The transaction went ahead, and I got my introducer's commission from Pierre.

The end of my Paris adventure came suddenly. One evening not long afterwards I was negotiating as usual with the German soldiers when two civilians in long black leather coats approached me. I froze in terror. They at once asked me in French what I was doing talking to the soldiers and demanded to see my papers, but when they saw my false German name and place of birth in Alsace Lorraine they became slightly more friendly and spoke to me in German. I felt sure they must have heard my heart pumping furiously, but I kept smiling. I assured them I was merely a guide showing our friends the interesting sites of Paris, though my throat was dry with fear. “Come with us,” they said, and escorted me to a car. I was nothing special to the Gestapo, all this was just routine for them. If they observed any sign of my terror as we drove at a leisurely pace towards their well-known headquarters opposite the Paris Opera this would not necessarily have alerted them to anything – they would have been quite used to this reaction.

I was escorted through a large arched entrance door beneath the huge swastika flag and into a vast echoing atrium with a central reception desk. The interior seemed nightmarishly vast and I felt insignificant in its spaces. The Gestapo men exchanged salutes with the official at the desk and led me up a wide flight of stairs and into a large, sparse office. There was a desk in the centre, a portrait of Hitler on the wall and the black, red and white of the Swastika flag. But my eyes were drawn to the desk because set on it, like some ornament, was a plaster cast human skull and next to this I saw a sheet of paper with a few large Hebrew characters on it.

I was seated in a chair, the second officer left us, and the first Gestapo man, now seated behind his desk scrutinized me for what seemed an eternity before he began his interrogation. It started with my family. In this instance, I had prepared myself beforehand aware of the possibility of an arrest. My story came fluently. My father, I told them, had been imprisoned by the French because of his outspoken pro-German attitude. “I feel as German as you,” I went on, telling him how delighted I was that Alsace was once again part of the Fatherland.

The interrogation was almost over, and I believe that the truth of my racial origins remained hidden by the man's own vanity.

He now warned me, his voice coming to me through the fog of my fear, that he did not want to see me again in Pigalle.

He sat down at his desk again, and began writing. I sat there watching his hand move slowly and methodically across the white paper, heard the scratching sound the nib made on it, which tortured my stretched nerves further.

"This is an address of a German office which hires German speaking people. You will earn quite well," he assured me, "and you will be together with your own people."

I do not recall my exit from his office, only being out on the street again, amidst the bustle of people going about their daily business. I laughed to myself, nearly hysterical from the release of the tension which had boiled up in me inside Gestapo Headquarters. "Look! Look!" I said to myself, "now I am a proper Aryan!"

The old Gestapo headquarters still stands there, opposite the Paris Opera, merely an office building, like any other.

I understood only one thing: that from this moment onwards it was too dangerous for me to continue working in Pigalle. I went to see Chris and Pierre and told them what had happened to me. Pierre agreed with me that I must disappear from the area and he promised to discuss this matter with Andre, the gentleman I had met previously who was interested in information about the German troop units. Shortly afterwards, in a bistro, I was introduced to a man who only called himself Pascal. Pascal remains in my mind an anonymous sort of figure, softly-spoken, about forty-five years old, with glasses. He was thorough – he had a list of questions for me - my

background in Vienna, my time in Belgium, the names of my aunt and uncle in Gaillac; he even wanted to know if I was circumcised. He asked me about my political views and I told him that I was a member of the Socialist Students movement in Vienna and that I was and would always be a Socialist. We then made a date to meet in three days time, when he would tell me what to do.

Joining the Maquis 1943

Pascal had instructed me to proceed to a town called Figeac, in the Departement Lot, and to travel from there to a village called Cardillac. Figeac is not very far north of Gaillac, but it was now 1943. I had witnessed the round-up of Jews in Paris and knew that to mix with other Jews would be foolhardy. Being with family, Jewish family, offered me no prospect of security. The bonds of family life, which the Nazis had so easily broken had inured me inside to such attachments - the only resource I had was myself and my false papers, declaring me to be a native of Alsace, and I was sure that nothing else would see me through. My only aim was to fight the Nazis with whatever means possible.

Pascal had told me to lunch in the restaurant Chez Marcel, and to ask for "Robert." I found this young man, and as soon as I mentioned Pascal he knew my purpose and told me to follow him. His accent was from Marseilles, and so strong that it was hard to understand him. Outside was a motorbike and Robert indicated this. I was thrilled at my first ride on one of these machines. I clung tightly to his waist and enjoyed the buzz of the engine and the rushing of wind in my ears. We stopped all too soon amongst some hills dotted with abandoned shepherds huts. In one of them lived a group of young people, and I became one of them, a fledgling resistance fighter. In another lived Albert, our leader.

What a mixed collection of individuals we were! - so much flotsam and jetsam thrown together by the war: communists in danger of arrest, young people who did not want to labour in Germany under the new law, (the Service du travail Obligatoire requiring unemployed Frenchmen between twenty-one and thirty years old to

register for employment in factories in Germany.) There were, like me, a few Jews - three I think we were - another, a Catholic priest, who spoke against the Nazis, and had joined us to escape arrest, like his brother at Exaarde.

Our barn was well placed on the top of a hill, with a view of the area below, and the main road from Figeac to Bergerac. We slept on straw pallets and washed in a nearby stream. In the evening we moved around by candlelight. By day we did odd jobs for the surrounding farms, and got food in return, and a little money. Need was our only guide in the hills, and when we could not get work we stole chickens from these very same farms. It was a strange heady time for me, when theft seemed right and proper and food was cooked over small fires in huts.

Yet our very acts of resistance often led my thoughts back the situation I was in, because of the enemy who had torn apart the fabric of my family life. I thought of the desperate letters my parents had written over the last few years, in particular that strange edited-unedited one about people being forced to go to Poland. Yes, I am sure I received a similar one during my time in Belgium. From the date of it, 28th October 1939, I would have been in Merksplas at the time. Of course I knew that Jews had been deported to Poland - it was this policy of "re-patriation" which led to the assassination of von Rath in Paris and so Kristallnacht. Had this been my parents' fate? Had they been forced "to return to the place of their birth?" I had no means of knowing. How naïve I was, to have imagined that this was the worst that could happen to them.

During these morose times I withdrew into myself, away from my new comrades in arms, finding solitude at a particular secluded place on a hillside. Here I allowed myself to weep, and when I stopped weeping, conducted conversations with myself, persuading myself that I would see my family again - not, here, perhaps, in Europe, but in some distant country far away from the persecuting beasts. Surely that day would

come to pass, at the end of the nightmare? These lonely outbursts of emotion seemed to do me good. I recovered my spirits and gained the courage to carry on, to live and to fight. The elation of striking back at the Germans returned. In the wider context of the war, what we did amounted to gestures only, but for me they were of tremendous importance. I was with the Maquis, fighting the enemy by whatever means I had. I was proud of my small achievement.

It was now July 1943, and the Allies had not yet landed in Europe. But on 11th November 1942 the Germans had taken over the unoccupied zone and were stationed everywhere and the Vichy Government under Laval had created the Milice, to arrest all anti-German groups and deport Jews who had been sheltering in the unoccupied zone. We set up lookouts on the road to warn us of approaching German or Milice vehicles.

Our leader, Albert, was a humourless individual, who always wore a black beret over his dark hair. He was physically muscular and any emotional slack he might have had was taken up by his communist fervour - he was quick to rage at any argument for an opposing political view. We were afraid of him and so obeyed. The strict discipline he imposed on us gave us some semblance of professionalism, without which we might not have survived. Once in a while the motor-bike man, "Robert" turned up with mail; he never stayed long and I had quickly learnt to ask few questions.

We had very few weapons, but Albert taught us how to fire a sten gun and use explosives. We used a nearby wood for target practice. We had a radio and listened to the BBC, following the progress of the Allies, from the bombing of Rennes and Rouen, to the capture of Tunis and later, Sicily. In the evenings we sometimes recounted the personal histories which had brought us together. So many stories, so many I have long since forgotten, but a few have remained in my memory. There was young Jacques' story.

He was a communist and the SS had come for him in his village in Brittany. He hid in a barn and watched as his parents were led from the house by the SS. They hit his mother who cried out, his father rushed to protect her and they shot him on the spot. There was another, older man, whose name I cannot remember. He was also arrested as a Communist, in his case a well-known one, a local leader. His torturers were not German but French Vichy Police, who wanted names. This man showed me the deep scars on his legs and back where they tied him naked to a wooden board and thrashed him with a whip. They poured scalding water on his wounds, these Frenchmen. He gave names in the end, but of people who had long since escaped to Spain. There was a French Jew called Maurice. His parents had been deported in a rafle in Paris as Polish Nationals. He had no idea what had become of them. Maurice and his brother fled Paris to the Unoccupied Zone. They hid in barns or with local people, but Maurice's brother was caught stealing from a farmer and turned over to the Vichy police. Maurice managed to run away.

One day Albert told us we were going to blow up a German troop train which would pass through early the next morning and he set about delegating roles in the sabotage. We got to the railway line at dawn in a state of high excitement. We helped with all the fetching and carrying but it was Albert who had all the expertise and he attached the explosives to the line. We waited. As soon as we heard the approach of the train we ran to the hills. We watched the flash and heard the explosion and then saw the engine topple over dragging the wagons after it, an enthralling yet oddly remote spectacle, as if it were all some clever film studio effect, the engine and carriages really a child's train set. We made good our escape to some mountain caves some thirty kilometres away; we knew the Germans would soon be looking for us. We later heard that they had suffered some casualties, and had arrested ten people from surrounding villages, who had nothing to do with the sabotage. I never even wondered what happened to these people.

Figeac had a market day twice a week. I loved going there, simply to enjoy the hustle and bustle of normal life continuing in spite of the war. Peasants from neighbouring villages poured in to Figeac to sell aubergines, carrots, tomatoes, spinach and cucumbers - all these items available without ration cards. Naturally there were shortages, in particular eggs and chickens were strictly rationed, but in corners the black market operated unchecked, and one could buy almost anything there. The market reminded me of the Karmeliter Markt, where my mother used to take me on shopping expeditions. In the Figeac market I particularly liked to wander amongst the cheap bric-a-brac in the antique stalls. I lost myself gazing at and handling all these trashy treasures. The pall of war would lift, one could forget it or imagine that it had nothing to do with you.

On one of these trips I noticed a very pretty girl, with an abundance of rich, red hair. Her shirt, I noticed, was unbuttoned almost to her navel, the valley of her breasts easily visible every time she bent down. Perhaps I should have taken heed at this sort of display but, as it was, my head spun and I didn't know which part of her to look at first, so I followed her, now changing my focus to her fine legs. As she was all by herself and carrying a heavy shopping bag I approached and offered to help her. She smiled in acceptance, and now it was the greenness of her eyes which I noticed. She told me her name was Jacqueline and that she was shopping for her mother, who was not very well. We walked together. I told her I was from Metz and worked for a farmer up on the hillside. We went to a bistro and talked. She told me she had broken up with her boyfriend.

We started to meet in the evenings at a certain bistro and went for walks into the woods around Figeac. We made for an area called "Le chemin des amoureux." Secluded by trees we lay down on the soft moss, warm from the intense summer heat, to make love. As in Paris I preferred the dark and used a condom to hide the truth about myself. I thought it was love, with this very first girlfriend of my own age. In a weak moment I confided to her

that I was not working at a farm but was hiding on false papers because I did not want to go to Germany for forced labour.

Jacqueline was a moody girl and we had many fights. I found her stubborn - perhaps because I was also. She always seemed to want her own way. On one occasion we had arranged to meet at a certain bistro in Figeac and she did not turn up. An hour later I ran into her at the market stalls. "I had other things to do," she said by way of explanation, "you're being childish." "And you are completely selfish," I retorted. The argument grew heated and I turned and marched off. Some time later she apologized, but the seeds of our failure together were sown there. When I decided to end things between us I tried to do so gently, but Jacqueline raged at me and we had our final battle. I had taken my pleasure with her, she accused me, because she was good enough for that, and now I was leaving her with no consideration for her feelings at all. She slapped my face, spat at me and left. I felt only relief.

A week later Albert told me to take a message to another resistance group, this one in Bergerac. I am clear about the date: it was 5th August 1943, my mother's birthday. My train stopped in the middle of nowhere, and we were surrounded by the Milice who boarded the train and demanded every traveller's identification papers. I saw them arrest many young people. The French Milice were quite efficient in their work. When my turn came they consulted a book and smiled. I was placed amongst the other young people, and then put into a truck. We were taken to a nearby jail where we slept on bare boards.

The next morning a French Milice officer interrogated me. He had my identification papers in front of him. He shouted at me, "We know your papers are false, we know you are part of a terrorist group. Before I start breaking your jaw, give me your name and who you are working for. He stood, with a fierce expression on his face, menacingly clenching and unclenching his fists. *Jacqueline! Jacqueline!* I kept thinking, *It is you who*

have betrayed me! You know I have false papers! I shouted back at the Milice officer, " I am not a terrorist!" This only maddened him and he struck me hard in the face. Blood streamed down my shirt, as he yelled, "We know this is not your real name! Tell us what it is and the names of those in your resistance group! We can make you tell us!" He hit me again with his fist and I fell, hitting my head against the wall. I must have fainted, because I remember coming round to cold water splashing in my face. I made a calm decision. I knew of the brutal methods of the Milice. I did not want to betray anybody, or to suffer more. So I made a confession and announced, "I am an Austrian Jew from Vienna called Alfred Knoller, I am hiding from the Germans, and have nothing to do with any resistance group." The officer looked stunned, stared at me for a moment, turned on his heel and soon I heard him on a telephone in the next room. He came back and drove me to Gestapo Headquarters, where I repeated my story . The next day I was interrogated by the Gestapo. I gave a vague and misleading story as to how I came by my false papers.

I cannot help but still believe in Jacqueline's betrayal to this day. It was the way the officer on the train smiled knowingly at my papers. Perhaps I am wrong, and these costly forgeries were just not as good as I thought they were.

Jacqueline may still be alive. Only she knows the truth, and it will probably die with her. In any event, how was she to know that her betrayal of me, if betray me she did, was to lead me straight to Auschwitz?

I was put under armed guard and taken by train back to Paris, to a place in a quiet suburb called Drancy, the assembly camp for deportation East.

Drancy, September 1943.

I arrived at Drancy transit camp with ten other Jews. It looked like nothing more than a big grey apartment block in a "U" shape. A double stretch of barbed wire encircled the whole area. Armed French gendarmes patrolled between these stretches. A watchtower stood at each corner of the camp, also manned by French police. These were the same French gendarmes who threw down their arms at liberation and joyously melted into the celebrations. Our courtyard was about 200 x 40 metres. Armed French police patrolled here, too. A few SS officers - there were only four at Drancy, all that were apparently needed - directed certain Jewish prisoners with armbands bearing the initials M.S, which stood for "Membre de Service." These men had positions of responsibility in the camp. I had no idea of the system then but, in typical fashion, as in the ghettos and the concentration camps, internal administration and discipline was placed in the hands of prisoners selected by the Germans. The Chef de Camp was therefore a Jew, one George Kohn, who controlled a group of thirty men in charge of camp discipline. These men were exempt from the lists, until they displeased the Germans, so they willingly carried out any orders. The French police, under the command of an ex-commissioner of police Guibert, liaised with Kohn and the MS. Another official there was Monsieur Fonseque, a civilian. I believe he was attached to the Vichy government. These men were merely faces at the time, it was only after the war, when I began my research, that I discovered their names.

S.S Hauptsturmfuehrer Brunner ran the camp, a man as physically insignificant as Himmler, with a monotone of a voice, which he never raised. His opposite and second in command was Hauptsturmfuehrer Brueckler, a brutal heavily set man, with large fists he never hesitated to use. We called him "The Boxer." The other SS man was Oberscharfuehrer Weisel, incongruously a hairdresser in civilian life, a more intelligent man, but quite willing to back up The Boxer's violence with a stick. There was a third SS man who seemed to have little to do with the day to day running of the camp.

We were lined up in the courtyard and registered. Those who had valuables handed them over to the Jewish Membres de Service. The receipts given looked impressive enough, listing all property carefully and it reassured people. The property was then placed in paper bags, numbered according to the receipt. "Don't lose your receipt!" the administrators warned. Of course, nobody ever saw their property again.

And now, at last, with the yellow star they handed to me, I was officially a Jew again. I gazed at this piece of material, coarse and heavy in my hand, in which it was set, that symbol I had so often observed from a distance in Montmartre, yellow, with a black Star of David and the

word, "Juif" set in the middle of the star. The game of hide and seek was over for me. I was one of them again, one of my accursed people. Were my parents at this very moment wearing this star? I wondered, and ached for them afresh. Later, one of the women sewed the star on for me.

We were taken to a huge room lined with double tiered wooden bunks. The room was extremely cramped and we had just enough space on the floor between each bunk to set down our belongings. On all four floors of the building there must have been two thousand of us. Men and women were segregated.

Families gathered on the ground floor, where there were rooms with a few tables and chairs. We ate and idled away the time playing cards. Uncertainty, speculation and argument filled our discussions. Some were sure the Nazis would kill us. Others argued, how could this be, as we had been given receipts for our property? Others said that not even Nazis would kill the children, and besides, they needed workers for their factories. The German war effort had claimed most of their workers, hadn't it?

We were told that there were weekly lists published of those selected for the next transport. The official story was that families would be united in the Reich, to work in factories. Anyone with a particular skill would be so employed, carpenters, builders, watchmakers. Others would be assigned to jobs as the need arose. Very few people believed what we were told. Those who had been arrested during the rafles with their wives and children had experienced much abuse and so were especially dismissive of the official line. Heated debate about what to do followed. We discussed means of escape. "They kill people who try to escape," said one. "Even if you steal something," said another. There was no proof, but the rumours kept most people fearful and compliant.

Youngsters know less fear, believing they are immortal. I slept next to a boy from Germany and fell in with his group of friends, also German. One day we were messing around in a basement area. One of us happened to walk over a concrete slab. "Come over here!" he called out. "Listen to this, it's hollow!" and he stamped on the slab. We all gathered round excitedly and moved the block aside. Underneath was the beginnings of a tunnel, about five metres long, and looking quite fresh. It led towards the outside of the building to the wall adjoining the barbed wire fence running along the road. Others, now deported, must have started it. "What do you say?" the boy who had found it challenged. In spite of the danger the eight of us decided to work day and night, telling nobody of our discovery, to complete the tunnel before our names appeared on the list. We had poor tools and moving the earth to sites where it would not be noticed was obviously hard, so progress was very slow. The task was, in truth, almost impossible, and perhaps we knew this in our hearts, but it felt better to do

something, anything, rather than play cards, debate our fates and have ones mind fixed only on the next list.

The expectation of the journey East led to many suicides, particularly amongst the women. It was the children who invented the name for this vague and terrible destination: Pitchipoi. Soon, we all called it that.

New lists of deportees were announced over the loudspeaker system. Families would remain together, these announcements assured us. The whole camp stampeded to the administration building to see if their name was on the new list. We were like the opposite of students seeking their examination results - we were hoping against hope that our names would not appear. But no more than four weeks after my imprisonment at Drancy my name appeared, on 5th October 1943. I returned, naively no more than thoroughly dejected, to my young friends. I had felt sure we would finish our tunnel and escape to freedom. "Most of us are on the list as well," they said, as were many others in our dormitory.

It was on this last night that I got to know Pierre Heimrath. He was older than me, a good-looking man and a great flirt. It turned out we were from the same district in Vienna. "I wish I had known about that tunnel," he said. We spoke about escaping from the train. We liked each other and there and then decided to stick together. And we did stick together, by that pure luck so essential to survival in the camps, from that day until the death march on 18th January 1945 from Auschwitz. We somehow lost each other on that march, but Pierre survived and we met in France shortly after the war.

Transport No 60

We assembled on 6th October 1943 in the main square, were checked and, for the journey, given a piece of bread and margarine. We were permitted one suitcase each. In this I easily managed to fit my slim possessions. A bus guarded by armed French police took us to a sealed off platform at Gare du Bobigny. The platform was lined with SS men with whips and dogs. In front of each wagon we were lined up in rows of five across and twenty deep. The mathematics was always neat and simple. There were invariably one thousand names on each list, so ten wagons in each transport, each to carry one hundred people. The trucks bore the legend "40 hommes ou 8 cheveaux," because they had been used to transport men or horses to the Front. Now forty men would become one hundred. For the Germans, there was a financial reckoning - the railway company had to be paid for our transportation - so that there was an economic factor as well to the gross overcrowding in the trucks. The constant shouting and use

of their whips by the SS ensured that the mathematical scheme and the economics were realized.

Those who had been hurried into the wagon first tried to reserve a place for themselves and their families by sitting on the floor. Their luggage took away additional floor space. A young man, who I recognized from Drancy as a good organizer, shouted above the noise, demanding to be heard. "We need to sort ourselves out, we cannot all sit on the floor. If we don't organize ourselves we will not survive this journey." He went on to state that the sitting space should be for the old, the infirm and nursing mothers, and that everyone else should alternately stand and sit every two hours during the day, and every three at night. Our self-appointed organizer made things more tolerable, imposing some order on the chaos of our impossibly crowded prison. A loudspeaker now blared: *You are being sent to a place where you will work for the glory of the Reich! Families will remain together and all those capable of working will be given work. Your train journey will last approximately two days. Anyone attempting to escape will be shot! You must all prevent escapes, because if anyone attempts escape the whole wagon will be severely punished.*

The doors were rolled shut by the SS men and we were eclipsed in darkness. Through the tiny barbed-wire openings at the top of each truck a little light came in. In the corner of the wagon were two buckets. One was full of drinking water; the other, empty, for sanitary needs. Soon the train jolted into motion. Within no time at all the sanitary bucket overflowed and the contents covered the floor. There was no alternative to relieving oneself directly onto the floor. The stench of human waste became overpowering. Our faces reflected despair and utter hopelessness, but our resourceful organizer came up with the idea of smashing a board in the floor to get rid of the excrement, and this would be a place where we could also relieve ourselves. "Please see if you have any tools in your luggage," he said. People produced scissors, knives; even a small hammer came to light. Soon we had made a small hole. Many wanted to go further, we wanted to continue with this hole, to make it big enough to escape from this horror, but there was resistance from the older people. Arguments started. "We are too old to leave the train, and there are young ones here, who cannot," objected the older ones. "Besides, you heard what the Germans said, they will do God knows what to us if we try." They were afraid, afraid of their frailty if we left them alone. In the end we abandoned the plan anyway, convinced we were in Germany by then.

People shouted at each other, as nerves frayed under the unrelenting pressure of so many other human bodies, the crying of babies which reminded us only of our own helplessness. Then, in shame, because public breastfeeding was unknown to us, we averted our eyes as one mother after another soothed her baby's hunger. All this made us feel as if we

were insane and it was little comfort that it was not us but our captors who were insane. The loud praying of the religious set our nerves further on edge. A university professor declaimed: "The Nazis are treating us as they think befits our status in their eyes, as Untermenschen. Therefore we must prove them wrong by never relinquishing our moral standards. Even in these dire circumstances we must ensure that our intellect prevails, so that we may emerge a people of dignity and moral standing." A young man, unable to contain himself, shouted angrily across the professor's address, "You do not know what you are talking about with your 'proving them wrong.' Do you think to win their respect? Ha! They are not interested in any *example* from us. They want to rid the world of all of us. "Mein Kampf" makes this perfectly clear. Have you not read that worthy document, Herr Professor? The Nazis shout *Jude Verecke*, and they are doing their best to make that a reality. Is this truck not proof enough for you? I say, then, to hell with your decency and moral upbringing. The moral life is dead, dead, don't you see that? We must do anything to keep alive, even steal from each other. It is the only hope. It is every man for himself. The world has no idea what they are doing to us. We must escape and announce the truth. That is all we can hope to do." The professor looked appalled. Voices, including mine, were raised in protest against the young man. "You are crazy I said, "you have no right to upset people with these words. Have we not receipts for our things, to be refunded at our destination? They need us, after all, their young men are in the army. We must struggle to remain human beings, and come out of this as such. The Allies are in Sicily- Mussolini is finished, the Russians have halted the German offensive....." And so I went on, hopeful as always, but it was the young man who was right, and not we who protested.

An elderly man sat next to me who reminded me of my father. He tried to lift our spirits, telling us that we would come out all right from this ordeal. I created a little extra room for him. Robert Waitz was his name. He was a professor of medicine. In Auschwitz I would have him to thank for my survival.

Sometimes, we stopped at railway sidings. We called for water in our perpetual torture of thirst. A few curious people occasionally approached but the SS hurried them away. We thought we were in Germany as it was German we heard spoken.

The train continued eastwards and the temperature in the truck plummeted. It snowed, and we held out containers, pieces of cloth, anything to catch a few drops of moisture. Our young organizer ensured that everyone received a little liquid. I have entirely forgotten this young man's name who helped us survive that journey, and so cannot honour him in this text.

Once, amidst the bickering, the moaning of the old, amidst our degradation and despair a single anguished woman's cry silenced us. "My baby, my baby, she is not moving, Help me!

Help me!" My elderly friend Robert got up and went to the child. The baby was indeed dead, he said in a low voice. The mother screamed again, wanting to hold onto the baby. But finally she surrendered the infant to a bearded religious man, who took the baby in his arms and recited a prayer. He covered the baby with a prayer shawl he took from his suitcase. The entire wagon then recited the Jewish prayer for the dead. This dignified, ancient Jewish ceremony brought us momentarily all together.

How long had we been travelling? It was three days and nights. Where were we? All we knew was that it was bitterly cold. But when the train stopped and we scrambled to the tiny open slats in the truck we saw that the name of the station was a place called "Oscwiecim."

The doors of the wagons were pulled opened. The light poured in and showed us SS men with dogs. The SS clapped their hands to their faces because of the stench coming from us. To the Nazis we Jews were subhuman. By a perverse feat of circular logic the starving, stinking condition in which we arrived at Auschwitz, stumbling blindly more dead than alive from the trains, confirmed their ideology. A voice from a loudspeaker urged us to be calm: "Welcome to Arbeitslager Auschwitz. You have had a rough few days in the train. But now you have arrived at your destination. Please descend from your truck and line up in rows of five (that "five" again) in front. Take only your most important belongings with you and leave the heavy cases in the wagon. You will receive them later in the camp. You will be temporarily separated. Women and old people and children will be transported by lorry into the camp. Men will walk to the camp. You will be re-united later. Everyone must obey the instructions of the officer as to who will walk and who will take the lorry. The faster this is done the sooner you drink and eat."

As he spoke we saw these people in dirty striped garments step forward. They helped some people out of the wagons and also took the baggage from inside. All this under constant shouts from the SS of "Schnell!" They piled the luggage a distance away from us. It would be rich pickings for the black market for them. We were lined up in front of the wagons, exposed to the bitterly chill air. The SS set about others still struggling to get out of the wagons. The woman with the dead baby screamed hysterically to an SS man that her baby was dead. She was useless, so he directed her immediately to the lorries, which she probably accepted as a mercy: but all those taken to the lorries went straight to the gas.

An SS officer selected those who were to walk to the camp. I was amongst them. I was glad to see my friend Robert was also selected to walk, and so we marched together towards the camp. The march lasted about fifteen minutes, until we saw from afar the gate and its inscription: Arbeit Macht Frei. We saw the barbed wire all around, the men in their machine

gun watchtowers. SS officers and other prisoners in the same pyjamas stood at the gate.

It was music which greeted us, played by musicians in the same odd striped pyjamas.

This was Pitchipoi, our new home.

This is the official documentation regarding my particular transport, Transport 60, compiled by the French historian Serge Klarsfeld.

CONVOY 60, OCTOBER 7, 1943

On September 30, Brunner telexed Eichmann and asked him for the go ahead for the departure of a convoy on October 7 (XLIX-49). Eichmann responded favourably (XLIX-50) and added that a commando from Stuttgart would arrive to escort the convoy.

Convoy 60 included 564 males and 436 females, 108 were children under 18. Among the families were Erna Koch and her two babies, Monique (1) and Nicole, who had just been born on July 22. Herta Bolz with an infant, Henry (2 months) and Elise (3). Others included: Victoria Bovetis and her five children - Maurice (14), Michel (12), Suzanne (10), Simone (8) and Jacqueline (6). There was Raymond Chorezyk (17) his brother, Marcel (16) and their sister, Huguette (11); Annie Feder (3); Simon Friedmann (8); Jean Frydman; Bernard (12) and Irene Garfunkel (7); Colette Goldstein (3); Simon Horyn (1); Raymond Levy (3); Marce Rosenberg (10 months); Camille Sayagh and her five children - Reine (10), Henry (8), Claude (4), Georges (2) and Nicole (10)

This routine telex No: XLIX-52 was signed by Rothke. It established that in October 7 at 10.30am a convoy 1000 Jews left Paris-Bobigny with the Meister der Schupo, Schlamm, head of the escort. On October 13, Hoess, Commandant of Auschwitz, telexed to Rothke telex No: XLIX-53, that on October 10th at 05.30, the convoy actually arrived.

When they arrived at Auschwitz, 340 men were selected and went to Buna, the I.G. Farben synthetic rubber plant at Auschwitz. They were assigned numbers: 156940 to 157279. One hundred and sixty nine women remained alive and were given numbers: 64711 to 64879. The remainder were gassed. In 1945, less than two years later, 31 of the 509 selected survived. Two of the survivors were women.

Pitchipoi - Auschwitz III 1943-1945

As we passed through the gate, one of the prisoners standing with the SS shouted *Muetzen Ab!* (Take your hats off) He knocked off the hat of a middle aged man who was slow in obeying the order. We were marched to a large square area where we were lined up in rows of five. A prisoner, who stood out by his superior dress, addressed us in German translated into French by a French-speaking prisoner. "I am your Lager Aelteste. You are here in Arbeitslager Buna, which is part of the Auschwitz Concentration Camp. You are here to work and obey. Those who do not will not live for long. As you leave the camp to go to your work place you will line up in rows of five and stand to attention to be counted. You will not talk or move. The same procedure will be repeated when you return from work. When an SS officer approaches you, you will remove your cap when you are three meters from him. You will do this smartly or be beaten. You will wait until he has passed and then put your cap back on. Now, you will be directed to the bathhouse where you will strip and be deloused - we do not want your filthy lice in this camp. You will then be showered, registered, your head shaved and a number tattooed onto your arm. You will receive new clothes and shoes. Only then will you receive food and drink. So the faster you finish the faster you will eat. Now, on the double, into that hut."

There another prisoner waved a stick at us and shouted: "Filthy Jews! Strip off! Leave your clothes on the floor in a neat pile. Leave everything in your pockets and don't think to hide anything. We will find it and beat the daylights out of you! Now run to that block for delousing!" Naked, we ran to the next block where we were sprayed with chemicals and ordered into showers. We had left the train as much dead as alive, so now we started to drink the water from the showers to satisfy our raging thirst. But they did not give us enough time even for that. Every activity was at the double. With shouts of *Raus!* and *Schnell!* and blows to our naked bodies we were driven from the showers, dripping wet, and into the next barracks where we shivered in the cold as barbers, who were other inmates, waited to shave all hair from head and body. Those who had arrived with their families tried to make conversation with these barbers to find out where the women and children were. "Forget about them," they said, "as you will not see them again. They were gassed and their soul is now on the way to heaven via the chimney." We railed at them for their poor sense of humour. Hadn't we been told we would be re-united with our families in the Camp? The barbers merely shrugged, indifferent to whether we believed them or not. They had heard the newcomers disbelief countless times. And should it have not been evident to us, they might have reasoned, forced as we were to argue in the shame of a naked condition, what value our lives possessed in this place?

After the shaving came the tattooing. That was when I became a number. "This is your name from now on, 157103. You will never be called by your name, only by this."

It was only then that we were given the peculiar pyjamas to hide our nakedness. Both jacket and trousers proved to be far too big for me. A striped cap, shirt and some wooden shoes completed the miserable outfit. When I put on the shoes I found that both

were for the left foot. Perhaps, I thought, I might find someone who had a pair of shoes for the right foot. As I stood up my trousers fell down. It was like some ghastly comedy. I took the string shoelaces from one of my shoes and used it as a belt to hold up the trousers. So now I had two left shoes, and one of these with no strings. Later I managed to find someone with two right shoes, and I recovered a piece of string from some corner. We were also given a metal bowl and a metal spoon which, at least, gave us hope that soon they would give us something to eat.

Again we were lined up in rows of five, counted, and stood, waiting for something to happen. We talked amongst ourselves.

Finally, we were ordered to forward march by a young prisoner who turned out to be an assistant of the Blockaelteste. These prisoners were no more than boys, pretty boys, thirteen years old or so, selected by the Blockaelteste for sexual purposes. They were called *Pipel*, and had all the vicious caprice of a young person granted power over others. We learnt to dread them - to become an enemy of one of these boys made life not worth living. A father of one of them was in our barrack and had to endure the sight of the Blockaelteste repeatedly caressing his son and, finally, removing him to his own quarters. The father wept on his bunk, shaking his head. His only consolation was that his son, who would receive extra rations to make sure he remained desirable, might live through the hell of the camp.

We were marched to our selected barrack, No 53. "Line up over there!" shouted a kapo, and we were directed to a space in the barrack outside the Tagesraum, or quartermaster's room. In this small room the food was distributed. The smell reached our nostrils, tormenting us in our starved state. The same prisoner shouted *Achtung!* We came to attention as a tall, broad shouldered man entered the Tagesraum. Although he also wore striped clothes, these were well tailored and even elegant. He bore the green triangle of a German criminal. "I am the Blockaelteste" he announced, "and these are my helpers." He pointed to two whips which hung on the wall behind him. "I will use these if I have any trouble with you. You live, eat and sleep in this barrack. Choose your sleeping partner. You will receive no replacement for any lost item, not a shoe, not a bowl. Take your eyes from them for a second and they will disappear." No bowl, no food, I soon understood. He told us to form a queue behind a large metal cauldron. At last we received hot soup. We devoured it, feeling nearly human again with something hot inside us, as thin and lacking in nourishment as this gruel was.

"Can you believe such words? They just want to frighten us." We were speaking of the barbers and could not stop thinking about their words. The faces of the older men, who had been separated from their families, remained strained and questioning. Had they not been told they would be re-united with their families in the camp?

"Smell the air," said the older prisoners, and we sniffed the sweetish smell drifting over from Birkenau and knew the truth. There were religious people amongst us. They said Kaddish, faced Jerusalem, beat their chests. It made the non-religious amongst us

depressed. Pierre shouted at them. "Stop crying for the dead! They will not return! We must be strong and hard, otherwise we'll all follow them." One of the religious rejoined, "we will only live if God wants us to." Pierre shouted back, "Did God want to kill all the old people, the women and children?"

On the bunk was a thin straw mattress and two blankets. There were three levels of bunks and I occupied the middle bunk with Pierre Heimrath. Our barrack consisted of approximately 350 persons. Of these, about 150 persons had been on my Transport, who were then put in the same barrack as me. Although Pierre and I shared a bunk, it was pure fortune that he was later assigned to the same Commando as me. Such friendships, as I have said, were vital to survival in the Lager. That, and luck, and it was my luck that Pierre and I were to remain together during our time at Buna and afterwards, on a part of the death march westwards.

We slept in our shirt alone and wrapped our jacket and trousers around our shoes, eating bowl and spoon. This was the procedure which served the double purpose of providing a rough pillow and a measure against theft. We fell asleep at once.

"Raus, Aufstehen" These were the harsh shouted words we heard that first morning, and for every other morning in Buna-Monowitz, (Auschwitz III). Again, everything on the double It was still dark outside. We were rushed out of the block into the freezing air and into the washing facilities. There was a round basin with six taps, cold water only, for which one queued. We held our shirt and jacket between our legs, mindful of theft. The metal bowl, which we all called "Die Schuessel," was attached with a string to our waist to make certain that we were never without it. No Schuessel, no soup. On the black market, I later learnt, you would need six bowls of soup or three rations of bread to buy back your Schuessel.

Some of the prisoners only wetted their hands and faces with the icy liquid, but those of us who still felt the importance of cleanliness stripped to the waist and washed properly, even as we drew our breath in sharply as the cold liquid touched us. Perhaps already in this early distinction, the mark was placed upon those who might survive and those who would not.

On my very first morning I had seen the queue at the basin but there was another identical one set apart, which was not being used. I did not think what any of this might mean. I stripped there and started washing. In an instant I felt my hair grabbed violently, I was spun round and struck full in the face. My glasses - I had been short-sighted since I was six - fell smashed to the floor. A Kapo, fist clenched, stood in front of me and shouted: "This fountain is for Kapos only, you dirty Jew!" Blood was streaming from my nose. My friend Pierre Heimrath saw this and led me to the other taps. He put cold water on my neck and soon the bleeding stopped, but the blow deviated my septum, so that my right nostril

remains blocked to this day. We rushed back to our block so as not to miss the distribution of the hot "Ersatz" Coffee, a black watery liquid and our bread ration for the day, a slice of bread of about 200 grams together with a piece of margarine.

After the distribution of the coffee and bread we were again lined up again in rows of five, were counted again and put under the command of a Kapo whose duty it was to march us to our place of work. The kapos all wore an armband with the word "kapo" on it. I quickly learnt the meaning of these camp symbols. A green triangle indicated a German criminal. After the war I discovered that these criminals had been given the option of remaining in jail or of "having a job with authority to control Jews." A red triangle was for political prisoners. Some of the kapos were "red triangles." One might think that their political status might have made them less brutal than the "green triangles" of the criminal inmates. This was not the case. Kapos were privileged and, to keep their status, they had to demonstrate that they were effective, which meant exercising brutality. Gypsies wore a black triangle, homosexuals a pink triangle, Jehovah Witnesses and other anti-Nazi church ministers a purple triangle. Jews wore the Star of David. In Auschwitz the body of the star was red and the points yellow.

It was about 6 am when we started to march through the gate to the rhythm of a German March played by the Prisoner's Camp Orchestra. This was a reasonably sized orchestra, with two cellos. How, I asked myself, could I join such an orchestra?

On the way through the gate we were yet again counted, in the presence of S.S. Officers and the Lageraelteste and other green triangle prisoners whose striped clothes were also better made. Our Kapo shouted: "Muetzen ab!" and we all took our caps off our heads. He then shouted: "Arbeits Kommando 95 mit 154 Haeftlinge zur Arbeit" (Work Commando 95 with 154 Prisoners going to work). So we marched in step wondering about the kind of work we would have to do.

After ten minutes marching we arrived at a factory complex with unfinished buildings. Everywhere I saw prisoners labouring: digging roads, carrying metal bars on their back, hauling railway wagons. Everybody seemed to be putting a lot of effort into their work. Our kapo took us to a railway wagon which was full of twenty-five kilo cement bags. We were assigned different tasks. Two of our Commando stood in the wagon and placed a bag on our shoulders and we were ordered to carry these heavy bags into an unfinished building about 150 meters away from the wagon. There, two other prisoners had to tear open the bags and tip the cement into a pile.

The kapo who supervised our work ordered us at the double back to the wagon once we had delivered the cement bag. Whenever an S.S. officer approached our kapo invariably hit us with a stick, screaming at us to work faster. We were not allowed to talk to each other or to take any rest between each delivery. The only time we managed to steal a rest was by getting permission to go to the toilet. Everyone wanted to do this, but we were only allowed this brief luxury twice a day, once in the morning and once in the afternoon. The kapo gave

the job as "Scheissmeister" (Shit Supervisor) to one of his underlings, whose job it was to chase the prisoners back to work with as little delay as possible. I was so hungry that all I could think of was the midday soup and the half hour rest from work. Auschwitz taught me that you never become accustomed to hunger. I had devoured the bread ration which I had received in the morning as soon as I got it in my hands.

I quickly discovered that theft of food was commonplace. Soon after my arrival at Buna one of my commando, who had arrived with me, ate only half of his bread one morning and secreted the other half underneath the mattress, to eat when he returned from work. I will never forget the despair of this man when he found that someone had stolen it. This incident was another reason why I habitually ate my ration of bread or soup as quickly as possible in order to make sure that the food was in my stomach and not in the stomach of some thief. That thief might have been me. In time, it did become me, when all pity for ones fellow creatures had long gone. I had managed to be the last leaving the barrack, as I always tried to be, before assembly in the Appelplatz. I had managed this before and on this day I struck lucky. Usually there was nothing underneath the mattresses, but today I found a piece of bread, left by some Haeftlinge. No doubt he had saved it to eat after work. In the evening a Hungarian Haeftlinge² was crying over this lost piece of bread, but I felt nothing. It was him or me, and I had chosen me. It is this experience of near starvation which, to this day, makes me eat my food very fast. I cannot bear to leave anything on my plate and I even pick at the leftovers on other people's plates. When I see food, I feel I must eat it. This creates embarrassment for my wife, who reproaches me for eating too much, and too fast.

Finally, the siren from the Buna factory howled the end of that first morning's work. We ran and lined up in front of the soup barrel hoping, perhaps, to find some vegetables in our soup. No such luck, the soup was so thin that, no matter how deeply the ladle was plunged into the cauldron, we could see our Schuessel through the liquid. We took the soup and lay down. Most of us fell asleep from exhaustion. But it seemed that no sooner than we closed our eyes than the harsh voice of a kapo obliterated our sleep: "Wake up! Back to Work!" And once again we carried the cement bags from train to the building. Heavier and heavier they seemed to become, as our backs bent under their dead weight. The relief of food and the oblivion of sleep were all we could think about.

I have said that our group consisted mainly of French Jews, who came with me on the same transport from Drancy. One of them was a real character, and it is a sad failure of my memory that I cannot remember this outstanding man's name and so honour him here. He was a rare breed, always smiling and trying to instil courage in us by singing, even as he

² Ed: as the reader may know, the Hungarian Jews were amongst the last Jews to be deported. So this man would have been a newcomer to Auschwitz, arriving in 1944.

carried cement bags. When we passed him on the way back to get a new bag he sang: "Courage Camerades, on les aura" (Courage Comrades, we will beat them). Everybody tried to be within his orbit. He seemed to be untouched by the nightmare world of the Camp. I, who considered myself an eternal optimist, tried to emulate his manner and I encouraged our fellow prisoners to do the same, to keep their spirit up and not to give up and become muselmen, those who had given up the will to live.

Maintaining an appearance of confidence was essential to survival. Once on the slope of despair ones end "up the chimney" was inevitable. I knew that the cement commando would get the better of me in the end because the impossible ratio of nourishment to energy required for this work made this inevitable. I had heard the camp orchestra playing, pleasure, not work, I thought, and pinned my hopes on the notion of joining it. I saw myself rehearsing and playing all day instead of creeping painfully under the weight of crushing cement bags.

The kapo's whistle sounded the end of yet another day. We marched back through the gates in time to a German march and I glanced up at the sign "Arbeit macht frei." Yes, I thought, work will make us free, it will kill us and then we will be free. But if I could get into the orchestra..... The kapo shouted "Muetzen Ab" and we at once snapped our caps from our heads. "Arbeits Kommando 95 mit 154 Haeftlinge zurueck im Lager!"

Now we would get what we had been waiting for all day, our evening gruel. We had now learned from experienced prisoners that the soup in the evening was thicker. It was therefore important that you try to get your soup from the bottom of the barrel, rather than the top. So you contrived not to be one of the first in line. Also, if it were not the Blockaelteste but one of his assistants who was serving, one might encourage him to "dig deeper" with his ladle.

After the soup I could not wait to go to the Music Block, No. 33, which was near the entrance of the Camp. I knocked at the door, and a Jewish prisoner, who looked about fifty, opened it. I explained to him that I was a cellist. "I would like to join the orchestra," I said. He looked at me and laughed. "How old are you? Sixteen or seventeen? We are all professional musicians, we do not have amateurs here." He called a tall middle aged man to the door, whom I recognised as the conductor. He was a political prisoner from Poland. I told him that I had studied cello since I was 6 years old, and that I was now 22. He asked me about my experience with orchestras, but here I could not help but tell the truth. "I have played with my school orchestra, and with my brothers in a trio." "Look," he said, "the musicians here were players with professional orchestras, we have professors of music academies here. I can't take on amateurs." He could only wish me luck. I left, deeply disappointed, my dream of a different, easier life in this hell, in tatters.

Yet my luck, that precious element, had not forsaken me. On the way back to the block I encountered my friend Robert Waitz, from the Drancy transport. He asked me what I was doing and I told him that I worked in the cement commando, carrying 25 kilo cement bags. I also told him of my failure at the Musicians Block. Professor Waitz listened attentively.

He told me that he was in charge of the Camp hospital and that he was very satisfied with his position. He said to me: " You took care of me in the train, I want you to come to the hospital every night and I will try to get you food, and other work." My friend Pierre had quickly got to understand the ways of the lager and had already got himself transferred to a Schlosser (locksmith) commando, a much desired commando. He became an "organizer," stealing and selling items from his work, as was commonplace in the Lager. I told the professor that my friend Pierre was pleased with the Schlosser commando.

Professor Waitz's words lifted my spirits. His promise almost made up for my disappointment with the orchestra. I would get through this ordeal, I thought. I had to, because I was determined to tell the world what had happened to the Jews in this place. And yet, for many years, this was the one thing I did not do.

I remember one day whilst I was on the cement commando that was different. The block staff woke us up as usual with their brutal shouts of: "Aufstehen! Rauss!" My body was aching. I was so tired but one had to obey orders or one would feel the rubber truncheon. I returned to the block, looking forward to my bread ration and the black liquid - at least hot - that they called coffee. I lined up with my commando at the Appelplatz. It was raining and in these conditions I would have to carry the cement bags. Weight, all I could think of was that crushing, damp weight. But when we arrived at the Buna factory we were told that the cement had not arrived and that instead we would be digging roads. This seemed a blessing after the back breaking work carrying the cement bags.

We were given shovels, and split into groups of ten.

The kapo told us what to do and disappeared into his hut. He did not want to get wet. We did not work hard unsupervised, but whenever we saw an SS man we made a show of working diligently. Speaking German gave me no advantage other than understanding orders more quickly than my comrades and I translated these for them whenever necessary.

Unsupervised, we talked. But what do the French talk about? I say "French," but I was not French, neither was Pierre Heimrath who, like me, was Viennese but he, like me, had been a refugee in France - in his case living in Marseilles since 1938, where he had grown to love its cuisine. But in the lager ones place of birth had no relevance, we had been arrested in France and so we were French.⁵ *Franzosen!* the kapos shouted at us. In the system of camp numbers 157 onwards were all Frenchmen. So, what do the French talk about? Food! Pierre and the others, the real Frenchmen most of them, conjured up marvellous recipes for each other. Garlic, wine, and pate predominated in these fantasy meals. Pierre spoke about his Marseilles restaurants. He gave us all the ingredients of bouillbaisse and told us how he loved creating his own recipes. Others joined in with descriptions of their favourite dishes. When it came to my turn I had to admit I had never cooked in my life, but that I loved food nevertheless. So I told them my own food fantasy. It went like this: I was free, just after liberation and was returning to my little room in the hotel in Pigalle, a room which Pierre knew all about as I had told him of my life in Paris. I enter my kitchenette, and prepare some hot chocolate and a plate of biscuits. I take an aluminium bucket and fill it to the rim with hot chocolate. I place the bucket on the floor next to my sofa bed, put on the radio, which is always playing Dvoraks New World Symphony and I lie back on the sofa. I have a china cup, fill it with the hot chocolate from the bucket, and savour the wonderful flavour repeatedly until the bucket is drained. I then finish the plate of biscuits and lie there just listening to the music, imagining that I am part of the orchestra, playing the cello. My dream created much laughter, but my stomach did not enjoy all this talk about food. In fact, I had only told them of my dream so as to keep in with the general mood of the Frenchmen. I was longing for the break and the thin, hot soup. The

⁵ I do not remember the names of the others I worked with. In 2000 we had a reunion in Frankfurt in the IG Farben House and I was hoping to recognize some of the survivors, but I did not.

sirens screamed and we all rushed to the hut where the bucket of hot soup awaited us. There we were told that the cement had arrived, and we looked forward to a long, hard afternoon.

Brutality, casual and otherwise, was our existence in the Lager. Of the casual variety we all received blows and flicks of the whip from the Kapos to encourage us in our work, particularly when the SS were about.

I was personally beaten only twice. The first occasion, on my arrival at the Camp, I have described. The second occurred in this way. I knew that British prisoners of war worked in the factory. As prisoners of war, they were subject to entirely different treatment to us. They received red cross parcels and were well-clothed. One day I saw a group of them not too far away. I asked the Kapo for permission to go to the toilet but instead I ventured towards the British prisoners, warm in their lined jackets against the cold and not separated from us by any fence or barbed wire. I asked for a cigarette, a valuable commodity, which I could change this for a bowl of soup in the camp. One of them threw a half finished one towards me. On my way back our Kapo came quickly towards me and hit me full in the face. Blood streamed once more from my nose. He dragged me to the hut, and found the cigarette in my pocket. He took his rubber truncheon. I had to lower my trousers and he gave me ten hard blows on my behind. I remained silent under this punishment, crying only later when I returned to the heavy cement bags. In fact, I felt fortunate only to have received ten blows, rather than the customary twenty-five. The Kapo had enlightened me as to the reason: he was in a good mood that day.

It was a few months after this that I witnessed an execution.

At the end of one particular day we returned to the camp, looking forward only to the soup. It was getting dark and everywhere hundreds of commandos in wooden shoes were struggling through the soggy Polish mud. I heard the Camp Orchestra playing. We marched upright, in step, smartly. I had some protection against the biting cold. Some time ago I had found an empty cement bag in a building and put this dry thing under my shirt. Discovery would have meant a severe beating. As we passed under the gate, the kapo shouted out "*Kommando 95! Mit 150 Häftlinge zurück im Lager!*" (Commando 95 with 150 prisoners back in the camp.) I was afraid of being searched, though this rarely happened unless the SS suspected something. But instead of marching us to our barrack we were being directed to the Appelplatz.

There, under the light of the giant watchtower other lights illuminated three black gallows set on a raised platform. We heard the sounds of jackboots and the SS appeared, taking up positions on the perimeter, each with machine guns pointed at us. SS Hauptsturmführer Schwarz arrived with his entourage of officers. The Kapos shouted "*Muetzen Ab!*" *Caps off* and fifteen thousand prisoners pulled their wet rags from their heads.

The Lageraelteste now marched with three SS men to a nearby bunker and brought out three prisoners, whose hands were tied behind their backs. When the lights caught their pale faces we recognized them at once. They were Janek, Nathan, and Leo, three privileged prisoners who were working in the SS barracks, and so envied by all of us, because this position gave them access to better food.

Accompanied by three Kapos the condemned men mounted the gallows with defiant demeanour. The kapos put a noose around each man's neck. The three were made to stand on chairs. An officer addressed us in loud, bombastic phrases. "In the name of the German people and by order of SS Reichsführer Himmler the three prisoners, Nathan Weissman,

Janek Grossfeld and Leo Diamant are condemned to death by hanging for their treacherous activities against the German Reich." There was a short silence and then a voice called out came from the gallows. "*Kopf hoch, Kameraden, wir sind die Letzten.*" Courage, we are the last ones. Another shout from the gallows. "*Es lebe die Freiheit*" Long live freedom! The officer became enraged. He had suffered a moral defeat. He shouted "*Los!*" Get on with it! and the three kapos kicked the chairs away. Inspired by the defiance of the three victims, now slowly swinging before us, we in turn all shouted *Servus!* "*Servus*" being both a greeting and a farewell. This unusual act was greeted by looks of momentary uncertainty on the faces of our tormentors. They did not seem to know what to do, and it was almost as if power seemed to hang momentarily between our tormentors and us. But that solitary moment passed, order was re-established, and we were instructed to parade past the gallows. We had not been told of the reason for their execution, but later there was a rumour that they had been involved in an underground movement which, possibly by some form of collusion with the Blockaelteste or the Schreibstube (the administrative office run by Jewish prisoners), had saved prisoners from the gas chambers.

My friend Professor Robert Waitz kept his promise. One morning the Block Aelteste called my number and told me I was to be transferred to the "Schlosser Commando NO 43, the Commando of Locksmiths. I was delighted. I had told Professor Waitz that my friend Pierre was with this Commando, and pleased with it, and the Professor said he would see what he could do. I had already told Pierre about my meeting with the professor, and such was my irrational, natural optimism that I felt sure to obtain my transfer. And now I had so, together with Pierre, I started work there.

The new kapo, a German criminal with a green triangle, seemed a milder character than the cement commando kapo. We were taken into a factory building and given the job of moving heavy pieces of metal from one place to the other. The kapo prepared a wood fire in a metal drum. This was a paradise compared to working outdoors, where it was now snowing. After dumping the metal pieces, we had the joy of passing the fire, and warming our hands for a few seconds. The kapo tolerated this, unless we lingered too long, when he would chase us away.

It was here that I became a party to Pierre's stealing: we stole mainly nails and screws, Stealing items was very dangerous because we were often searched on returning to the camp. Discovery meant twenty five strokes on the backside if a kapo caught you, but death if the SS did. The kapos, who were themselves heavily involved in the trafficking, kept any items so found. Pierre and I devised a system of transport. We made a bundle of the stolen items, attached it to a string or wire, and lowered it inside our trousers to knee height. I mainly stole nails - for ten nails I got a bowl of soup from the Blockaelteste. Once Pierre managed to steal a small hammer, smuggling it into the camp after tying it with a piece of string down his back.

The greatest fear we all had was of the selections, the routine roll call of life and

death. Some selected themselves. I had witnessed three throwing themselves at the electrified fences, their bodies lying limp and ignored on the ground for hours afterwards. Selections took place on Sundays. We knew when they were coming, because we were told to remain in our barrack. Then came the order stand by our bunks and strip naked. This was the time when a glance of an SS doctor decided whether you lived or died. We looked around, reckoning which of the Muselman would "go up the chimney" this time round. Sometimes the Blockaelteste would separate a Muselman before the formal selections. Of course, we were all bags of bones, but it was not merely a physical matter, not merely the yellow pallor which was peculiarly theirs. The Muselman was hunched, meek, moved only with effort, he had tears in their eyes. He was terrible to behold, but we must keep away from him, he was contagious. We sought re-assurance from one other, I always from Pierre: "Do I look like a Muselman? Do you think I will pass, if I throw out my chest..... like *this*?" Pierre tried to calm my fear. "You look fine, anyone can see that there is still a lot of strength in you. Just walk confidently and quickly in front of them, and make sure you hold your head high. Then, you have nothing to fear."

The SS arrived. We marched before them in turn. Numbers were noted down, and these were the condemned. For a while there would be an empty place in a bunk, which was soon filled. With a semblance of confidence I marched before them, and lived, grateful only that it was another whose number was noted down, and who would soon disappear.

Through the Camp grapevine, we avidly followed the progress made by the Allied troops, the advance of the Russians, and the Normandy landings in June 1944. Towards the end of 1944, we heard that the Russians had entered Poland. Our will to survive was thus given a great boost. Yet our constant topic of speculation was what the Nazis would do with us. Would they liquidate us before the Russians arrive? "How do you hide the death of so many?" I and others asked during these discussions. They are going to evacuate us and take us into Germany, I said, and in this, I was proved correct. But I had no idea of the way this would be done.

It was a beautiful August Sunday morning in 1944. We did not work on Sundays. We heard a sound in the sky, which turned into a steady drone, and then we saw what looked like hundreds of planes coming towards us. Yes, it was planes. At last we were seeing the allies, not only hearing their artillery. We saw the SS running to shelters and we went to our barracks, but we were not afraid, not even to die. We were jubilant, laughing that our liberators were coming, and delighted to see our persecutors running for their lives. It was the Buna factory they were targeting.. Not a single bomb dropped on our barracks although we were only three miles away from the factory. Afterwards we saw some of our comrades returning from the factory, bringing dead and injured with them. One returnee said that the factory was almost completely destroyed, but our hearts lifted when he told us that some Germans overseers and SS had been killed. The kapos redoubled their ferocity as they saw a small, new gleam of joy in our eyes.

On the 18th January 1945²³ we did not go to work and were ordered to remain in the barrack. The Blockaelteste told us that we were leaving the camp. We were given an extra

ration of bread, and some soup, and soon afterwards had to line up in the usual formation: columns of five, each column consisting of ten rows. I stood with Pierre. We were marched out of the camp at night. Every second column was guarded by an SS man. It was bitterly cold and snowing. I had regularly replaced the first cement bag with others when they disintegrated. I kept them under my shirt. And so I had this extra insulation from the cold, apart from my blanket, and perhaps it was this cheap discardable material which saved my life.

And so, escorted by armed SS men we were marched from the camp into unknown territory. I was one in an endless column of ragged humanity.

Death March, January 1945

We toiled through thick snow and when we reached the country road walking became even harder because the surface was slippery with ice. One of our number in the column ahead of mine slipped and fell, and seemed unable to get up. An SS man at once despatched him with a bullet through the head and some prisoners were ordered to throw the body into a ditch. Now the road ran through a forest. Flight seemed possible. I saw us fleeing, zig-zagging to avoid the bullets. I whispered something to Pierre about running, and he said to wait until nightfall. He and I were in a better condition than many others. I had enjoyed the vital extra food provided by Professor Waitz, and Pierre was better fed, too, through his trading activities. Nobody could rely on the camp diet alone for survival.

Quite close by I saw another prisoner having difficulty marching. He went to the edge of the road where there was a pile of stones and sat down to adjust his shoes; perhaps he wanted to tighten the strings. An SS man ran over and shot him. This time there was no order to throw the body into the ditch. It was so near where the man lay that it was an easy matter for the SS man to kick him into it. The sharp crack of bullets through the freezing air became so commonplace that I scarcely bothered to look around when I heard it. In any event, looking around took energy and I had to conserve it. Others supported struggling comrades. I supported nobody. One must only keep on ones own feet, I decided, two could slip as easily as one.

We came upon empty villages abandoned before the Russian advance, and all the while the distant rumbling artillery of their heavy guns accompanied us. We dragged ourselves like automotons through one after the other of these villages, each a slender hope that we might be permitted to stop, perhaps even get a little nourishment. A time came when I felt wetness and pain in my foot from the rubbing of the wooden shoes. *Only keep on your feet*, I again told myself. As it got darker two young men broke from the column and ran for the shadows of the forest. A crack of bullets and they fell. Pierre whispered that to flee was hopeless.

As night fell we at last halted, and were separated into abandoned barns. I found a piece of dry earth and collapsed. So soon the harsh command of *Rauss!* *Rauss! Aufstehen!* It was dark outside when we assembled, if assembled is the right

word for the shambling, feeble creatures we were. Again the freezing cold, the columns of ten, the rows of five. We had eaten or drank nothing since leaving Buna and now we stooped to grab up handfuls of snow to slake our raging thirst. I did not believe I could endure another day of this. I walked simply not to be shot. I had no soul, only an instinct to survive. The sharp crack of rifle shots in the icy air as more lives were casually extinguished meant no more to me than the fact that the bullets were aimed at someone else. The rumble of artillery in the distance, belonging to those who would come, conquer and perhaps judge seemed to answer these shots.

On the afternoon of this second day we reached a small town called Gleiwitz. My group was put inside a brick factory, where I collapsed again. Somehow, Pierre and I became separated. Soon after the war I came across Pierre again, I think it was in Nice. Is it not incredible - no matter how I rack my brains - that I am not sure about the place of our re-union? We then spent some time together, and I know that we never spoke about our experiences. I have recently been trying to trace Pierre Heimrath through French Survivors newspaper. All I have is a photograph of him at our re-union.

Soon came the angry shouts to rouse ourselves, but the person sleeping next to me did not move. He bore a red triangle inscribed with the "F" of a French political prisoner. I shook him, but he was dead. Quickly I tore the triangle off and then searched his pockets looking for any food, but found only a rusty pin. Still, this was a useful find. I pulled off my Star of David, and set the triangle there instead with the pin. Now I am no longer a Jew, I thought, so I may have a better chance. By this stage of the war I do not believe I gained anything by this action. His blanket, which I also took, helped more.

At last, at the line-up, we were given some food, hot soup and a piece of bread. The SS went back into the brick factory and random shots rang out as they made sure of those who had not stirred. We were marched to the railway station and loaded into open cattle wagons. We were squeezed in so tightly we were hardly able to sit. It started to snow. We had our blanket, I had my two, and we pulled them over our heads. I do not remember how many days and nights we travelled, only that we sucked snowflakes to quench our thirst. Many still died and whenever the train stopped we were ordered to pile the bodies at one end of the

wagon. At one place, where we were fortunate enough to get some hot soup, I asked an SS man if we could remove the bodies, but I received no reply and the door shut. The smell of death and excrement were as unbearable as ever.

As the journey continued westwards I was astonished to see that we were passing through Vienna, for there before my eyes was the famous landmark of the Riesenrad, the Ferris wheel of the Prater, set high against the dusky sky. For the first time since I had left my family behind at the railway station four years ago I, who had forgotten what tears were, began to cry. Yet how quickly tears were succeeded by anger! And my anger was not aimed at our inhuman persecutors, but at my all-too human parents, who had foolishly ignored my plea to leave with me. With them my anger found a manageable target. Though I did not know it, they were already dead, gassed in Auschwitz-Birkenau during my own time there.

The stench of the dead and excrement in the wagon was unendurable. We thanked God that at least we were in open wagons. After more days and nights the train stopped and we were given some soup and bread.

I lost all sense of time until we arrived at our destination, which was called Nordhausen. The wagons were surrounded by SS. They flung open the doors and backed away as they had at Auschwitz as the odour engulfed them. We could scarcely stand, though the SS soon recovered their shouting voices and used whips and blows to drive us once more from the wagons. We hardly registered any of it.

Once more the rows of five, and now we were led to a building, where we were ordered to strip. We were taken to a long, enclosed room with hundreds of shower heads. We knew of the gas chambers disguised as shower rooms, and although I was now beyond caring whether this was to be my end or not, when the shower heads hissed, it was water, hot water, which splashed down on us. Evidently the Nazis had further use for us. Yet all too soon we were chased naked from the showers into the icy cold and into another room. Here, we were issued with a fresh shirt and wooden shoes. In another room, a doctor, who was also a prisoner, examined us.

We were in a barrack once more. This barrack was at least reasonably well-heated, which boosted our morale considerably. We received soup and a piece of

bread and I fell asleep on the bunk at once, even though its base was merely made of wooden planks, not even the straw mattress of Buna. I have no memory of my bunk companion.

DORA and BERGEN-BELSEN 1945

Next morning, along with ersatz coffee and the piece of bread, we received a slice of salami, an unexpected delicacy. Most of the prisoners looked reasonably well. There were no kapos here, and no musselmen either, and though some of our incoming number made up for that soon enough, by this stage of the war the concentration camp system as we had known it was over. I learned we were at a place where they produced rockets in tunnels. We were underneath the Hartz mountains, near Buchenwald as I now know. Ours was one of its satellite camps. Here were produced the infamous V1 and V2 rockets. My job was merely to push trolleys on rails from one section of the tunnel to the other. There were Russian POWs in faded uniforms also working here, and Polish volunteers. No doubt my French political red triangle did assist me in my relations with these East Europeans, who had little love of Jews.

At first I was pleased to be at Dora, because there was no shouting or beating and the work was easier. Even the Jewish prisoners who I saw on my arrival seemed to be in reasonable condition. On our shift we mingled with foreign and volunteer workers. I remember speaking to a number of French volunteers in the tunnel. We ate the same food as the foreign workers, nutritionally superior to the thin soup we received when off duty. Work was in two long shifts, the first from six in the morning to six at night and the second from six at night until six in the morning. When there were air raids we slept uncomfortably in the tunnel, on the ground without a blanket. We and the Russians were slave labourers, but there were also forced labourers from other countries there.

There was organized sabotage of the rockets by the workers. We heard that they introduced sand into the rocket mechanisms¹. Each time a rocket was sabotaged in this way gruesome executions followed, which we were made to watch. Short ropes attached to hooks were placed around the workers' necks. The very electrical mechanism used to lift heavy parts of the rockets, was activated

¹ Ed: this rumour was accurate

and lifted the hooks slowly from the ground. We had to watch as the victims choked to death, struggling and writhing until the last spasmodic jerkings. I learnt that it took a man approximately five minutes to die in this manner. Afterwards we had to parade past the bodies. On one occasion a particularly large number of workers, including Russian prisoners, Jews, and civilian workers were executed and, after we had been made to stand and watch other workers took our places to watch the remainder of the executions.

As time passed we began to notice the increasing nervousness of our masters, the same signs I had seen at Auschwitz. Once again, and with rising hope, we heard the boom of artillery, but conditions worsened at Dora as food became scarcer.

And then, on a day towards the end of March 1945 - I had been at Dora for three months - we were once again loaded onto cattle wagons. A short while into our journey we stopped, the scream of sirens announcing an air raid. Then we journeyed on, hearing the retreating drone of planes overhead and with the temporary distraction of this incident removed the thirst returned to plague us again. Once more death and excrement began to fill the wagon with their stench. At one point in the night the doors rolled back and we received soup and bread. Once in a while we stopped at villages for meagre refreshment, where the local inhabitants seemed unsurprised to see these skeletons in striped pyjamas.

We had been five days, I now know, on that wagon before we finally arrived at Bergen Belsen. It was to be my last stop.

The camp was vast and crammed full. My group was put into a building of a brick construction, formerly used by soldiers, I later discovered. Other prisoners were put in the usual wooden barracks.

Belsen was simply a camp of death. There was no work and fewer beatings and, as there was no running water in the latrines, which were blocked and overflowing, the now normal stench of excrement was with you wherever you went. The water in the washrooms was polluted. The only drinkable water was from a solitary tap in what was the kitchen area, and where one had to stand for

several hours to obtain a cup of water. We were now, in truth, less than human. We spent the time picking lice from our bodies. We scarcely received any food.

Soon typhus ran riot. People died in their bunks or wherever they sat, sometimes in their own faeces. I contracted the disease.

One day I heard that a cache of turnips had been found buried near the kitchen building. Anyone who could move went to the place and scrabbled frantically in the earth. I got some and gorged on them, but this only seemed to stimulate my illness and I was racked with pain.

On another day I noticed an odd sight. Two young men were tracking an inmate who was moving very slowly and then staggering as if in a drunken stupor. I well knew that this was the prelude to death. As soon as he collapsed the two inmates were on him, cutting flesh from his body with a knife. They ran away like thieves in the night. Curious, I followed them behind a barrack, where they made a small fire and cooked the meat. Sickened, I turned away, now only wanting the agony of life to end.

Then I, too became a staggerer, and was compelled to sit down ever more frequently. I registered the sound of battle ever nearer but heard it all as in a dream. Thirst, starvation and illness were my only realities. The rest concerned me no longer.

On 15th April 1945, two days before my twenty-fourth birthday and about two weeks since I had entered Belsen, one of the inmates rushed into our barrack as if possessed, shouting that there was a tank at the gates of the camp. I did not believe him, but left the barrack anyway and saw an apparition of soldiers surrounding SS men. The British had liberated us, yet the camp was silent. I do not remember any shouts. We could not believe, or were too exhausted to believe, that the ordeal was over. It was only when the British distributed a bowl of rice and hot milk that we understood that we might be human beings again. The soldiers smiled kindly and we tried to smile back. They warned us to eat only slowly, and as little as possible. Sound advice, which some simply could not follow. These were the ones who gorged and died of excess. The British made the SS dig mass graves for the numerous dead. They forced them to carry the bodies of their victims. It was a

heartening sight to see our tormentors forced to work, and under the goad of a rifle barrel if they refused.

I heard that there was a British officer, a rabbi, who was speaking German to inmates. I found this man, one Captain Hardman, who told me he came from London. He asked me how I was, and where I wished to return. I spoke of Vienna, where my parents were, and he informed me that Vienna was now occupied by the Russians, and that Hitler had made the city completely free of Jews, *Judenfrei*. I told him I had relatives in France, and thought they might still be there. My intention was to go to England or America. I explained that I had a brother in America, and that I only knew that my other brother had been trying to get to England from Holland. Revd Hardman wrote all this down. I had no idea, of course, that my parents and Uncle Hermann and Aunt Genya had perished in Auschwitz.

We remained in the quarantined camp. Our liberators had supplied us with various medicines to restore us, which one took three times a day. Slowly my health returned, my strength increased and my apathy fell away from me.

One day an officer asked me if I wanted to join a group of inmates who were going on a foraging expedition for food at local farms. There were around fifteen former *Haftlinge* out of Belsen, all in our conspicuous striped clothing. I jumped at the chance to see the world beyond the camp for the first time in three years. We were on foot, pushing a trolley, accompanied by a British soldier. We came to a farm close by where two women and a man, the farmer, met us. Heated discussion quickly followed between them and the soldier. The soldier told us to go into the farm buildings and the outbuildings and take whatever food we could find. I went into the kitchen, where I found sugar, flour and tins of vegetables, which I loaded onto a trolley and wheeled outside. The farmer and the women watched, talking excitedly amongst themselves. When I returned to the kitchen to continue my search I discovered a large portrait of Hitler hidden behind a storage cupboard. I found a knife and took the portrait to the soldier, who was outside with the farmer and the women. I slashed the portrait. The farmer spat at me and shouted *Du sau Jud!* Dirty Jew! A rage such I have never experienced seized me, and I stabbed the man. The soldier intervened at once, shouting at me, and ordering us all out of the place. I do not know how seriously I injured the farmer. One week later I was assigned to the first transport returning to France.

“Vive la Vie”

What a strange group of human beings we must have seemed to the outside world, clothed in our Lager stripes, but singing!....singing!.....on the train to Paris, and then on the bus from the train...all the popular songs we knew from before, “Au pres de ma Blonde,” “J’attrandrais¹,” and how poignant was that last title if we had stopped to reflect on it. People in the street waved at us, not seeming to take in our odd appearance. Perhaps it was because we were also singing the Marseillaise, or perhaps they were simply joining in with our mood.

We were billeted in a hotel called the Lutecia on Boulevard Raspail. They offered us food when we arrived, but we refused. Suddenly, there was too much food! Ever since liberation everyone had been feeding us. They wanted us to be normal again, like them, but we were not like them. They gave me a room and when I closed the door I realized that I was alone for the first time in years. Here a bed was prepared, with white sheets and a pillow. From the bathroom came steam - some unknown hand had already run a bath for me. How strange, how wonderful, that these things had been done for me!

I stood naked, and entered the bath almost reverentially. The warmth of the water was like a drug and I fell asleep, waking with a start when I swallowed water. I washed my body quickly. I dried myself with the towel they had provided, fell into the bed and slept a whole day.

The dressing gown hanging behind the door meant that I did not have to put on the stripes when I went downstairs the next morning. There was a good breakfast provided. Officials were interviewing several of our number. When my turn came I was issued with an identification card by the clumsily named Federation National des Centres d’Entre’aide des Internees et Deportes Politiques which entitled me to free public transport, double food rations and a complete set of clothes available from a storage area at the hotel. A doctor examined me. I now weighed one hundred and nine pounds. At liberation I had weighed ninety pounds. The same doctor gave me a voucher for a pair of glasses and told me he would make arrangements for my recuperation in the country. We were given money,

¹ Charles Trenet and Edith Piaf respectively!

ration cards and a laissez passer as a "prisonier politique," which gave us free travel on the public transport system.

I collected the suit, went to my room and immediately changed into it, but in the mirror I saw a stranger. The person I knew was the one in camp stripes. It was in those that I looked normal. This suit swamped me. "You scarecrow," my reflected image seemed to mock, "take that suit off! No suit will make you look fat again. Suits are not meant for you, as you can clearly see!" Later I had my stripes cleaned, as a memento of that life which had once been normal. It was only when I went to America in 1947 that I could bring myself to cut them up, save for a piece of my jacket with my number and the red triangle of the nameless dead French political prisoner, both of which I have to this day.

I did not feel ready to go out into the world on my own and the other *haeftlinge* felt the same. We just sat around in the hotel in our outsize clothing getting to know each other, discussing our possible futures.

It was here that I met Yvonne, another survivor of Auschwitz. We had a short, intense affair, born of that history which bound us together but about which we never spoke. She was older than me, soon to set off in search of her husband and family in the South of France. We promised to keep in touch and soon after she left she sent me three photographs, clearly taken before her deportation. Each had an inscription. One read:

42.114 pour 157.103 en souvenir d'un passe tragique, mais d'un avenir immences! Vive la vie, plus durable que la paix du monde. Yvonne Avril 1945.

The date shows that this affair took place a mere few weeks after my liberation from Belsen.

In her last card she offered me: "*toute ma gaite et mon amour.*"

I do not know whether Yvonne found her family. I did not reply to her and I cannot now be sure that she even sent me a return address. In the catastrophe which had befallen us our encounter was meant to have been this fleeting thing: we had been just two surviving specks, who had met and touched and loved for a

while, and so learnt again that we were human after all, enough for our separate roads ahead, our "avenir immences."

I went to the American embassy to find out if they could help me locate my brother, Eric. I was taken under the wing of a very sympathetic vice-consul called Mrs Dix. As I had told Rev Hardman I explained that I had no knowledge of the fate of Otto or of my parents, or any of my family save Eric. Otto was young, perhaps he had somehow managed to escape, but all I could tell Mrs Dix was that he had gone illegally to Holland hoping to escape to England. She was fascinated with my story and promised to do her best to find my brother. I have very fond memories of this exceptionally kind woman.

Meanwhile the French authorities had found a place for me to recuperate, with a family in a village. I informed the American embassy of my new address and boarded a train to the village of Salornay-sur-Guy in the Departement of Saone and Loire.

My sponsor was a Doctor Bennetin. He and his family received me warmly. In fact the entire village seemed to come out to meet me. They asked me about my time in the camps. I did not want to talk about this and they did not persist and so the pattern of my silence was set. But, some time later, Dr Bennetin wanted to photograph me in my camp clothes, which I agreed to. Looking back now these photographs, of a reasonably healthy looking individual dressing up like this may seem to be in poor taste, but at the time I believe there was no prurience in the good doctor's request, only a wish to mark the dreadful period in some way. It is for this reason that I reproduce the photographs here.

I met Janine, the chemist's daughter, and her family. I was attracted to Janine, but I only got so far with her, try as I might.

This pursuit of pleasure may seem strange to the reader. I had until recently lived for two years in the depths of human depravity and had emerged a skeleton. Neither did I know what had befallen nearly all my family, yet I seemed to seek only pleasure. How can I explain it? At one level, I am sure, I was driven to seize life with all the returning strength of my young manhood all but stolen by the Nazis. At another, deeper level, I was attempting to obliterate, or at least distract

myself from the past and the terrible possibilities of the present. I did not want to think beyond the moment at hand. I fell easily into that way of being. After all, this is how one had learnt to live in the Lager, without history, without thought, and with no wider hope than to live one more day. Then I remained silent for another twenty five years.

One day, some weeks after my arrival in Salornay, I was strolling with Janine when we saw a stationary American jeep in the distance with its driver asking for directions. We rarely saw cars in this small place, let alone military vehicles. Curious, we approached, and to my astonishment I recognized my brother Eric. I cried out his name and in an instant we were in each others arms. It was, in truth, almost impossible to understand that I was once again embracing my own flesh and blood. The three of us got into the jeep and drove to the Bennetins.

Eric told me how he had found me. His commanding officer had permitted him to visit all the camps where it was possible I had been. At Bergen-Belsen he discovered that I was alive and he had followed my route to Paris. There, my fairy godmother, Mrs Dix at the Embassy told him where I was. He was married now, to a woman called Vivian. And Otto? Otto was alive and well and living in Brooklyn. In silence I listened to Eric's account of his visit to "Judenfrei" Vienna. He had gone to our old apartment and found strangers, an old couple, living there. They invited him in and there, as in a museum, was all our family furniture. The couple told him that they had only been assigned the apartment a year before. He discovered from the Kultusgemeinde, where my father had worked, that our parents had been deported to Theresienstadt sometime in 1942 and that there was little chance that they had survived.

I have in my possession a document dated 28th August 1994 from the Theresienstadt Martyrs Remembrance Association in Israel, giving the exact information Eric did not have in 1945. My father, David, was deported from Vienna on Transport No 4/12-363 on 2/10/1942. My mother, Marja, on the same day on Transport 4/12-364. My father and mother were deported from Theresienstadt on 19/10/44 on Transports ES-559 and ES-560 respectively, the destination being Auschwitz. They therefore spent just over two years in Theresienstadt. There were only two further deportations from Theresienstadt after theirs, namely 23rd and

28th October 1944, carrying a total of 3753 Jews. The Russians liberated the camp on 27th January 1945.

Eric spent two days with me at the Bennetins, and I was as reluctant to speak about the past with him, my own brother, as with the strangers around me. The past was dead. It was a useless limb, which I had amputated. Eric must have seen the condition of the people in the camps when he was searching for me, but I told myself that I was no longer one of those people.

I was seized with my restlessness again and decided it was time to leave this peaceful village. Eric himself had to re-join his unit in Germany and he promised that he was going to do everything he could to obtain a visa for me for America. I promised the kindly Bennetins that I would keep in touch and left the shelter of their hospitality. I had been with them for just one month. I took the train South in search of the Bodeks, but felt compelled to visit Figeac in search of Jacqueline, who I was convinced had betrayed me. I went to the bistro where she and I had often met and recognized the owner. Yes, he told me, he knew Jacqueline, she had often come there with a German officer. Maybe she had gone with him when the Germans retreated, so many of the women who had gone with Germans had, they didn't want to hang around did they, the traitors? There was nothing to keep me here, so I took the train to Nice.

At the Jewish Community Centre there, where my laissez passer entitled me to a little money and a meal, I was eating with other refugees when I heard the familiar voice of my cousin Leo from an adjoining table. More astonishment, more joy, and with him was his new wife, Annie. Leo told me that his parents (my Uncle Hermann and Aunt Genya) had been deported by the Vichy Government, but that Rosi, who had got her husband, Max, out of St Cyprien, was living safely with him and Maxl in Limoges. We now knew of the gassings, but it was a long time before we knew for certain that all our parents had perished. We were luckier than many, for at least some of our family had been spared.

We left for Limoges the same day. Leo told me his story on the journey:

Maxl and I tried to escape to Switzerland from France in 1943. We had false papers, describing us as of French nationality, but born in Switzerland - and, of

course, we really had been born there. We changed our name a little - just enough, I think, from Bodek, to Bodec. Well, the Swiss caught us just over the border and put us in the hands of the German border guards. The German authorities suggested we work in Germany - we would be well-paid there. We told them we would think about it, and we left for Lyons, because we wanted to meet cousin Jonas Tempelhof, who had paid for our false papers. By pure chance we ran into him at the station, he was returning to his family in Neuchatel. Well, there wasn't much he could do for us and we stayed in Nice. I got a job there with a Jewish furrier, and Maxl with a Jewish tailor. It was all a mess, and really very ironic. Our employers actually knew we were Jewish, but what they were afraid of was getting into trouble with the authorities for hiring "French" staff, which was illegal for Jewish businesses. Anyway, I met Annie in Lyon. She was born in Paris, but her family, who were Polish, were deported from Drancy. Annie was living with a Christian family, who were worried that it would be discovered they were hiding a Jewess. So, Annie, alone, left for Lyons. We fell in love and started living together. Vichy started making life impossible for Jews, so we decided we would volunteer to work in Germany. Incredible as it seems, we all thought it was a better option. So, in February 1943, we were shipped to "Ostmark" - Austria, "our country" and we worked as labourers in a factory near Semmering, the Goering Werke. Annie worked as a domestic in the houses of German workers. When the Germans discovered we spoke perfect German, we got a much better job, as interpreters for the French volunteers there, and there were a lot of them. Our real problem was Annie. She would insist that she spoke perfect German. If it weren't so dangerous, it would have been comic, her stubbornness over this. We knew that what she was speaking was really the Germanized Yiddish of her parents. The director there was a Herr Witzman, and we got on very well with him. One day, I seem to remember it was in July, or around there, but definitely 1943, he invited Maxl and me for coffee at his home. There was some talk about the attempt on Hitler's life - which is why I date it around then - when Herr Witzmann remarked that it was a pity the attempt had not succeeded. Maxl and I were completely flabbergasted. Witzmann said, "Look, I know you are Jewish, my own brother-in-law is Jewish. You have nothing to fear from me. You'll be safe here." Annie got pregnant, but Klara, our daughter died. Afterwards, we were repatriated to France and married. We were in Nice to find out about Annie's parents.....²

² Ed: Annie's parents perished in Auschwitz

By the time we reached Limoges, a long journey, and I had fallen into the arms of Rosi, Max and my cousin Maxl, I was exhausted with the emotion of re-union - it was all too much to take in. Yet, how little changed they all seemed to me, and I began to wonder how I seemed to them. They did not press me for details of my experiences. I mentioned the camps, but not much more. I could only marvel at how we, the younger generation, had come through the evil of these times.

My cousins advised me to register with Le Comite Juif d'Assistance Social et de Reconstruction- COJASOR- where I would receive a ration card and an allowance as a deported survivor. Another survivor, Leo Bretholz, interviewed me. He was also from Vienna. "Yes, I was in Drancy, too, but I jumped from the train on the way to Auschwitz." He said no more, and I remembered how we had started making a hole in our wagon, but had given up the idea. We became friends. Leo had family in America and, like me, was waiting for papers to emigrate. Later he was to write an account of his survival. We spent a lot of time together. At parties we sang together - his voice was wonderful - and pursued girls.

In May 1946 I was offered a job as an interpreter with the American army. The 3046 Grave Registration company had the task of searching for unmarked graves of Allied personnel. German POWs were used to exhume the bodies for transport to their country of origin. The evidence of German atrocities was common knowledge by now, and they were hated. A black sergeant in the company told me I had the chance to repay the Germans for what they had done to me. He laughed when he pointedly told me I would always have an armed escort behind me.

Two guards accompanied the eight prisoners in our detail on that first day. "Make the bastards work hard," said these guards, and I knew that they were giving me direct authority over the prisoners. I felt elated. Seven of the prisoners seemed meek, but the eighth caught my eye. All the prisoners must have known I was a Jew, but this one displayed his contempt for me in every gesture and glance. He moved and worked slowly at my command. I shouted "Arbeit schneller, Ihr Schweine Hunde!" as I had been yelled at in the camps. They all worked faster, except him. He muttered something. I thought I heard "Sau Jud." I marched over

to him and asked him what he said. He only smirked in my face and I exploded, punching him in the face. "You are lucky it is the American army guarding you or you would have been killed by a Jew." One of the guards clapped me on the shoulder. He was pleased by what I had done.

Leo and I went to the American embassy in Paris for interview. There, we were interviewed by the Consul about our life during the war. And, yes, we had to sign papers to say we had never been a member of a fascist organization - or a communist one. I knew that, with Eric's efforts, my papers would arrive at some point.

So I was in Paris again. Leo and I craved only excitement. I cannot even remember where we stayed. Just as I did not want to think about my parents so I made no excursion to the Jewish district in search of the Hubermans. That and my other life of mine there with Christos I had partitioned securely off.

I remember one evening with Leo when we went to the Paris Opera - right opposite the former Gestapo headquarters - and saw the Barber of Seville. Afterwards we were drawn to the lights of a fairground in Place de la Republique and rode dodgem cars. It was here that Leo lost his wallet, which we did not notice until we got home. It contained his travel documents and papers confirming his status as a stateless person. We passed a night of terrible anxiety. The next day, more in hope than expectation, we made our way back to the fairground. To our amazement the man who ran the dodgems produced the wallet. He had found it, he told us, whilst clearing away that night. This small, decent action made us feel as if this stranger had restored to us not just the wallet, but ourselves, once again, to the human fold. It made us quiet for a while.

As the reader knows, I re-visited Paris in July 2000 to re-trace my steps of some sixty years before. Of Rosi's story of survival - her escape to Switzerland - I only had a rather vague letter she had felt driven to write to her grandchildren, who had become ultra orthodox Jews, living in Strasbourg. She wanted them to understand a little of what she and her family had been through. Her daughter Ruth, who lives next door to her in a Paris apartment block, has isolated herself entirely from the events surrounding her own birth in Switzerland. Neither is she religious. The Holocaust is not her story, it is her mother's. And Rosi's

grandchildren, in their orthodox enclave have, in a neat corollary, followed their mother's feeling. Behind it all is the fear of that possible annihilation which did not come but might have come. And so the pattern of willed forgetting passes on through the generations.

Rosi is eighty-seven at the time of writing this book and she lives in a tiny studio flat, as neat as a pin. It serves her needs perfectly. We sat over tea and Rosi told me her story, which I taped. It is a confused one, and there are parts which I have been unable to fit into a coherent chronology. There was a brief stay in Poitiers, where there was a Kernberg relative, who told them off for coming to the bombed city (this was before the occupation), there was a later account of a wicked priest and a duplicitous Vichy mayor, but I have not included these features, and I do not want to trouble Rosi now for clarification³. I spent a very pleasant afternoon with my cousin, who told her story without obvious emotion. Only once was she overcome, and this was when I showed her one of my father's original postcards written to Eric. At the sight of his handwriting on the card she cried.

ed with my brother, Otto, at the port of Le Havre. He was coming to Europe to study in Bern, Switzerland to obtain a medical degree which would be recognized in America. Otto is eighty-seven now and lives in New York with his wife Lotte.

³ as best as I can I reproduce her story in an appendix

EPILOGUE:

In 1951 I became an American citizen. It was yet another place, another adventure. The Nazis had achieved something in my case: they had managed to turn me into the Wandering Jew of anti-semitic mythology. They had shown me that I had no homeland of my own and, in truth, never had. It was a bitter pill to swallow, but it also gave me a compensating strength: I could settle anywhere.

I stayed with Otto, now qualified as a doctor, in a basement flat in President Street, Brooklyn. He had completed his medical studies in Switzerland and had gained his practising certificate in New York. He was married to Lotte, who came from Czechoslovakia. Eric lived in New York at this time with his wife, Vivian, and their son David, named after our father.

I started to take evening classes in English and became a filing clerk in a Manhattan finance company. I kept in touch with Leo Bretholz, who had come to the States with me and had settled in Baltimore. He called me one day to tell me that there was a vacancy in the textile firm he was working for as a salesman. I left New York and joined the Standard Textile Company of Baltimore. I moved in with Leo who had a little apartment. Living with us was another Viennese refugee, Fred Jacob. Traditional Friday night dinners were resumed at Leo's Uncle Ossi and Aunt Olga. Yet another Viennese refugee in our circle was Herbert Friedman.

So it was that in Baltimore, as in Vienna, I was once again living almost exclusively amongst Jews. To this day it remains a fact that almost all my friends are Jews. The anti-semitic atmosphere of my childhood and my subsequent experiences have made it so.

Meanwhile my circle of friends in the States grew. One morning a girl in our group contacted me: "Would I like to meet a girl from "the Old Country?" she proposed. The "Old Country," I understood, was the expression used for the whole of Europe. The girl mentioned was Freda, who was from England. I called her on Monday 9th October 1950, was fascinated with her English accent, and fell in love there and then, on the telephone. Leo shook his head over my impulsiveness. I didn't think things through, he said, and I was crazy, the girl may be hideous.

Freda and I met, and within four weeks decided to marry. Her father flew out at once to New York, ticket in hand to secure the return of his daughter. Who was I? he said, only a refugee with few prospects. Freda stood firm, and so her father stayed in New York for a while, perhaps hoping to change her mind by remaining. He met my brothers, and found it hard to dislike them. As a last ditch appeal he said, "Why don't you both come to England? And Freda, you will miss your family, you will not be happy here."

In this prediction Freda's father proved right. Two years later, as well as I was doing with Standard Textiles and Freda in her radio work, it was painfully clear to us that she missed her family greatly. So, in February 1952, we left for England. At first we lived with Freda's family in Hendon but, when we were hunting for our own home, it was our estate agent who, in remarking on my accent, re-united me with Freddie Breitfeld, now Bradfield, that friend of my youth whose parents had been wise enough to move their business to England before it was too late. "I know a Viennese, do you think you might know him?" said our agent. And so Freddy I and met again and he and his wife, Susi, became very close friends of ours.

England, the country where my two daughters were born, has proved to be a kind host, and I a grateful guest. Yet, as if in some echo of the past, both my daughters live abroad, Susie in Israel with our only grandchild, Nadav, and Marcia has recently moved to the Canary Islands, both as restless by choice as I by force of circumstance. So, even now, my family is not around me.

I returned to my cello in this country, playing with a local orchestra for many years. For some years Freda, I and Marcia ran a fashion business. Later, and until my retirement, I was a director with State of Israel Bonds. I continue to work with survivors of the Holocaust in the Holocaust Survivors Centre, and speak all over the world in schools about my experiences. It is a mission for me. I will never entirely exorcise the demons of my past, neither do I wish to. I wish only to confront them and in this, I think, I have succeeded.

Two years after I had settled in England with Freda, we were walking through the West End one afternoon, looking for somewhere to eat. We stopped outside a restaurant in Duke Street called "Ici Paris." I glanced in the display case

and saw a photograph of a woman singing. My heart suddenly raced as I realized that I was looking at Minna Huberman. Twelve years on she seemed hardly changed. The restaurant was closed that day so we took the telephone number and returned the following evening.

It was Minna who greeted us. I began to speak to her in French, I told her my name, I mentioned Hubermans, her parents, Otto Geringer.¹ Minna gazed at me. "Is it really you....Freddie?" We embraced, almost disbelievingly. She took us to our table and then joined us, introducing her husband, a Corsican gentile, who we later discovered had saved her from deportation. The remainder of her story was a familiar one: her parents had been deported in 1942, and she had never seen them again. The four of us shared a meal and the occasion was treated as a joyous reunion, but Minna and I made no arrangement to meet again. For what connected us but the very events we wanted to forget? Minna sang later that evening, some of the old Edith Piaf songs she used to sing in Paris in 1941, when the last customer had left Hubermans and Otto looked on in mute admiration, dreaming his hopeless dream of seducing her.

It was only twenty five years later, when I was starting to speak about my former life, that I felt the urge to meet Minna again. I made my way to the restaurant, but it no longer existed. I had lost her.

In 1979 I travelled to Paris to see my cousins Maxl and Rosi, but there was another person I wanted very much to visit. I had traced Professor Robert Waitz through Amicale d'Auschwitz et des Camps de Haute-Silesie and the address they gave me was in the heart of Paris. An elegant woman I realized must be his wife opened the door and I explained who I was. She smiled and asked me in. She quietly told me that her husband was now dead, very recently, only a few months ago. He had been ill at liberation, but had made a good recovery. I was so sorry, I told her, and wanted her to know that I owed my life to her husband, I would never forget his kindness. She cried, and said, yes, he had been a wonderful man, she knew it. She told me that she herself had survived in the war, hiding in the unoccupied zone, but I cannot remember the details of her story. We drank coffee and talked for a long time. I had so wanted to see Professor Waitz, and I felt an almost unbearable weight of sadness when I finally bade farewell to his wife and

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walked through the city of Paris, which, but for Professor Waitz, I would surely never have seen again.

In the camps I had dreamt of that future time when, free again, I would stand on a platform at some press conference, surrounded by hundreds of journalists, and tell my story to the world. I could not have anticipated the silence of my post Holocaust self, although the period of this was not so much longer than that of the world at large. It was only about twenty years after the war that society at last began to consider the scale of the Jewish tragedy.

I have learnt that silence about ones past does not bring forgetfulness and that its pressure becomes like the pressure of fire in the belly of a volcano.

One of the nightmares I used to suffer from disturbed me more than any. My parents stood by the gas chamber building, placidly queuing to go inside. I screamed at them: "Don't go in! Please don't go in!" My father just laughed at me and told me not to worry: "Everything will be all right," he said.

Yes, that was his nature, blindly optimistic. And mine, too. Perhaps it was a blessing for me, because I always believed that I would survive the camps, and that belief, and a lot of luck, probably did save me. But I had an advantage over my father in that I came to know my enemy unmasked, daily faced the depths of depravity of which he was capable, gauged the amount of effort and ingenuity and sheer deceit required to keep him at bay. And I was young. My father could not conceive of a world gone so utterly mad and, at their age, my parents would not have been given the chance to adapt to Auschwitz. They would have been useless and immediately expendable specimens to the Nazis.

Through the internet a distant Knoller relative contacted me with a story of my parents' last recorded days. In the confusion of those times it is hard to know whether it is fully accurate, partly accurate, or simply untrue. When I contacted this relative, Karen Pratt (nee Knoller), she said she could not remember who she heard the story from, but it must have been someone in the family. It seems, the story has it, that my parents had obtained exit visas from Vienna, but some other people, through bribery, succeeded in getting officials to change the names. Later, a chance came for my parents to go to Palestine, but this was, apparently, through

some illegal means and so, because the means were illegal, my father would not seize this opportunity. Even if the story is myth, it accurately characterizes my father's nature. And so my parents perished, for no other reason than that they were Jews.

I try to find some grain of meaning in all this, some small hope that human nature can rise above the worst of such horrors. And I do find some such hope in one of my mother's postscripts, in a letter from Eric to Otto dated 6th February 1939, when I was already in Belgium. She adds:

I must tell you that I have never seen such beautiful photographs as you have sent. Miami looks like a paradise. If possible please send Mr Hagmann a postcard from Miami. Fredy has also sent him a card, and he was very happy to have received it.

I have long forgotten this small action of mine, and neither do my mother's words stir any memory, but her words surely confirm that I was right to have liked Mr Hagmann.

At the start of the book I dedicated my story to my parents. At the end of it, I should like to add a further dedication to the six million who, unlike me, are forever silenced.

On 6th June 2000 Freddie Knoller, the Jewish boy who left Vienna in 1938, and became a survivor of Auschwitz and Belsen, took his place at the opening of the permanent Holocaust Exhibition at the Imperial War Museum and shook hands with the Queen of England.

Appendix

Rosi Bodek's story.

We left Vienna in 1938, first my brothers, Leo and Maxl in August, and then my parents and me. My fiancé, Max, had been arrested (he was of Polish origin). I sent him a registered letter, asking him to send his passport as I was making arrangements to get him a visa to San Domingo, in South America. He presented this letter to the prison authorities, who gave him twenty-four hours to leave the country. In this way, we were re-united in Belgium. He came with his mother. After the German invasion of Belgium we all escaped to France, where we were separated and interned as enemy aliens. The men were sent to St Cyprien (near Perpignan) and the women to a camp near Gaillac (in the Tarn) - I cannot remember its name. Without permission or papers (sauve-conduit) I left the camp and went to St Cyprien to get my husband out if I possibly could. You were there also, Fredy. I became ill with heat stroke and was put in hospital at the camp. They wanted me to leave the camp when I had recovered, but I refused to do so without my husband. I was able to produce some proof that I could support him financially as I had a small inheritance from my grandfather Kernberg in Switzerland. My brother Leo and my father were also able to leave, as Leo had been born in Switzerland.

During the time we stayed near Gaillac, I remember you, Fredy, on the top of a hay wagon, working for the farmer, a pitchfork in your hands. After Leo left, you followed, and it was now that the mayor started to make life very difficult for the Jews. He decided to put all of us in a camp near Gaillac. Me and Max bribed a guard to let us and Max's mother out. This bribe was supposed to include my parents, but there was a change of guard, and they could not leave. I now know that they were taken with other Jews to Gurs, and from there to Drancy and Auschwitz.

....when we left Gaillac we made our way to Nice. We had no papers, and there were many round-ups of foreign Jews. I had married Max in Belgium and now I was pregnant with my daughter. Naturally, we were terrified of

deportation. I got a certificate from a doctor that I was pregnant and managed to get some papers declaring that I was a Polish citizen. As I had some documentation now, I persuaded Max that we should try to cross the border to Switzerland. He was not so keen. In the end, he agreed. We got to Aix-en-Provence. By this time Maxl and Leo had tried and failed to get into Switzerland. They were in jail in Aix en Provence. I asked a Jewish looking man if he knew where the camp for Jews are, who are being deported East. He told me they went yesterday. I asked if he knew the Bodek brothers and he said: "Ah, the Swiss, no, they were not deported." There were no buses, and we managed to get a ride in a car to the camp, which was some way outside the town. I found my brothers. We had found another Swiss relative in France, Johnny Tempelhof, and he arranged for Maxl and Leo to be called to the Swiss embassy. Gendarmes accompanied them to the embassy, which was in Marsailles. Johnny bribed the gendarmes to allow them to go for a cup of coffee with him. They took their chance and ran away. It was Johnny who arranged their false papers, which enabled them to work as volunteers in Germany. Johnny had told me and Max about a guide in Annemas. We went there, but decided to cross the border on our own. We had extraordinary luck. There was a milkman. He said: You go this way," and there we were, safe in Switzerland. The Swiss police stole all our valuables. Max was sent to work in a refugee camp and I was cared with great kindness for by a religious Christian Swiss family. I have to say that my own relatives in Switzerland did not choose to help us. There, in Switzerland, Ruth was born.

In January 1946 I was finally re-unit

CHRONOLOGY

- 1921 17th April -Freddie's date of Birth.**
- 1933 President Hindenburg appoints Adolph Hitler a Reich's Chancellor*
- 1934 Attempted coup by the NSDAP (Nazi Party) in Vienna. Assassination of
of Austrian Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss'*
- 1935 German Reichstag passes anti-semitic "Nuerenberg Laws".*
- 1936 Fascist military coup against Spanish Republic, Start of Spanish Civil War*
- 1937 Italy joins German Japanese Anti-Comintern Pact.*
- 1938 March 11 – Anschluss of Austria**
- November 9 –Kristallnacht**
- November 25 – Freddie left Vienna for Belgium**
- December 7 – Erich left for the U.S.A.**
- 1939 May – Otto went to England via Holland**
- August – Freddie joins the Belgium Refugee Camp "Merksplas"**
- September 1 – German troupes invade Poland*
- September 3 - Great Britain & France declare war on Germany*
- 1940 February – Freddie joins new Refugee Camp : Eksaarde**
- April – Otto left England and arrives in the U.S.A.**
- May 10 – Belgium invaded by German troupes, Freddie flees to France**
- May 12 – Freddie arrested as enemy alien by the French and taken to
St. Cyprien**
- May 13 – Germany invades France*
- June 14 – German Army enters Paris*
- June 22 – German /French armistice signed in the Forest of Compiegne*
- July 11 – Petain forms Vichy Government. France split into two zones.*
- September – Freddie escapes from St. Cyprien and went to Gaillac**
- September 27 - German decree requires a census of Jews in
Occupied Zone.*
- October 3 – Vichy's first Statut of Jews, defining Jewishness and banning
Jews from higher public service and from positions
influencing public opinion.*
- November – Freddie left Gaillac and went to Brussels**
- December - Freddie went from Brussels to Paris**
- 1941 Januari – Freddie started to work at Place Pigalle**
- May 14 – First Raffle of Jews in Paris*
- August 20 - Second Raffle in Paris*
- August 21 – A German soldier is killed at Metro Barbes – Rochechouart*
- September 3 – German soldier killed at Gare de l'Est, Paris*
- September 5 – Exhibition opens in Paris of "Le Juif et la France"*
- December 8 – U.S.A. & Britain declares war after Pearl Harbour attack.*
- 1942 January 20 - Wannsee Conference commits the Reich to Final Solution**
- March 3 – First bombing raid by RAF on France**
- March 27 - First trainload of Jews leaving Drancy for Auschwitz**
- May 29 – Jews must wear Yellow Star in occupied Zone of France**
- June 1 – Transfer of responsibility of French security from German
Army to the SS.**
- July 16 & 17 – Grand Raffle of Jews of Paris. Taken to Velodrome
d'hiver and then to Drancy for deportation to Auschwitz**
- August 13 – Switzerland closes its border to Jewish Refugees,**

- November 8 – Allied landing in North Africa*
November 11 – Germans occupy the Southern Zone of France.
- 1943** *February 16 - Service du Travail Obligatoire (STO) is introduced.*
July 9 - Allies conquer Sicily
July – Freddie arrested by the Gestapo and warned to stop contacts with German Soldiers on Place Pigalloe.
July – Freddie joins the Maquis near Figeac
August – Freddie with Maquis blows up train
September 9 - Allies land in Italy
September – Freddie arrested by French Police and taken to Drancy
October 6 – Freddie's name on list at Drancy for deportation.
October 7 - Deported to Auschwitz arrived October 10th
- 1944** *June 6 - D-Day landing by Allies in Normandy*
August 15 - French and Allied troupes land in Provence
August 25 – Free French under Leclerc enter Paris with De Gaulle
- 1945** **January 18 – Evacuation of Auschwitz and Death March**
January 20 – Arrival in Gleiwitz
January 21 – Train Journey to Dora Nordhausen
January 27 – Soviet troupes liberate Auschwitz
January 27 – Freddie arrives at Dora Concentration Camp
March - Evacuation of Dora. Arrival at Bergen-Belsen
April 15 – Bergen-Belsen liberated by British troupes
April 28 – Retour to Paris, Staying at Hotel Lutetia
May – Recouperating at home of Dr, Bennetin in Salornay sur Guye.
May – Reunion with Erich in Salornay
June – Reunion with Leo and Annie Bodek in Nice.
June – Reunion with remaining Bodek family in Limoges
- 1946** **January – Reunion with Otto in Le Havre and holiday with him in Switzerland**
May 20 – Job in Limoges as Interpreter with American Army
- 1947** **January 19 - To the U.S.A. on “John Ericson” boat**
January 29 - Arrival in New York reunion with brothers.
- 1948** **March – moved to Baltimore and taking job at Standard Textile**
- 1949** **October 9 – Met Freda on a blind date**
November 24 – became engaged to Freda
December 31 – Freda and I got married
- 1952** **July 1 – We left U.S.A. and returned to England**
- 1953** **April 28 – Marcia was born**
- 1956** **June 16 – Susie was born**

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